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# Upsetting Geographies: Sacred Spaces of Matata

by

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fulfilment of the requirements for the degree  
of Master of Social Sciences at  
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Ko Putauaki toku Maunga  
Ko Rangitaiki toku Awa  
Ko Ngati Awa toku Iwi  
Ko Nga Maihi toku Hapu  
Ko tuteau toku Marae  
i te taha o toku Whaea

Ko Hikurangi toku Maunga  
Ko Waiapu toku Awa  
Ko Ngati Porou toku Iwi  
Ko Pokai toku Hapu  
Ko Tikapa toku Marae  
i te taha o toku Pāpā

*Dedicated to my Grandfather  
Eric Wilson (1914-1998)*

## Abstract

My research focuses on the emotional experience of the unearthing of ancestral bones for local Maori of Matata. The coastal town of Matata in the Eastern Bay of Plenty provides a central case study location as it is a town that is facing the pressure of coastal residential development as well the added strain of dealing with the 2005 flood which has compounded issues over local waahi tapu. Local iwi have continued to actively advocate for the protection of these sites especially with regard to the ongoing discovery of ancestral bones.

Cultural and emotional geographies provide the theoretical framework for this research. This framework has been particularly useful as it encourages reflexive commentary and alternative ways of approaching and thinking about, and understanding knowledge. I have incorporated the research paradigm of kaupapa Māori which complements my theoretical framework by producing a research design that is organised and shaped according to tikanga Māori while (in) advertently critiquing and challenging traditional ways of conducting research. The overall aim is to explore the current issues surrounding the discovery of ancestral bones through korero with local iwi members. It is through their perspectives, stories, beliefs and opinions that provide a better understanding of the meanings attributed to waahi tapu and the influence of certain events such as the 2005 flood. I examine, critically the relationship between power, sacred sites, bones and the body.

It is from these objectives that I contribute to an area of scholarship that has been largely left out from geographical enquiry. I suggest that the importance of sacredness and spirituality has been relatively overlooked as an influential factor in people's perceptions of the world around them. This thesis is intended to demonstrate the value of indigenous perspectives of bones, the body and sacredness as a way of better understanding some of the complexities that can arise when cross-cultural approaches collide in environmental planning.

There are three main themes that have emerged from this research. The first theme has to do with competing knowledges. To Māori, the location and knowledge of ancestral bones is culturally important and is in its self sacred, therefore certain tikanga is applied as a means of a protection mechanism. However this ideologically clashes with traditional scientific western approaches which are privileged over other alternative ways of understanding knowledge, in this case Māori knowledge. The second related theme concerns the process of boundary making and cross-cultural ways of perceiving 'sacred' and 'everyday' spaces. To better understand these perspectives involves acknowledging the embodied and emotional experience of wāhi tapu to Māori, and the active role of kaitiaki in the protection and careful management of these culturally important spaces.

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## **Chapter one**

### **Introduction**

In almost every culture there exists acknowledgment of some form of sacred space or place. The notion of 'sacred' can have a profound and emotional effect. Many of these meanings originate from complex cultural, spiritual or religious structures and are often underpinned by ancient custom and tradition. Academic scholarship has been fascinated with the 'sacred' for centuries, so much so that attempting to better understand sacredness has become a major component of particular social sciences such as anthropology and archaeology. Much of this interest stems from the fact that sacred spaces and places often have significant bearing on human behaviour and is closely associated with other universal events such as births, identity and death. It is for these reasons that exploring the meanings of 'sacred' can provide fascinating insight into cross-cultural worldviews and perspectives. However, even the term 'sacred' can be problematic, raising complicated issues of interpretation and the right to talk about 'other' cultures beliefs and customs. What is defined as 'sacred' varies from culture to culture and is influenced by a plethora of external factors such as identity, religion, worldviews and politics.

Sacred sites are of particular significance within Aotearoa as it is a fundamental component of Māori culture which is incorporated into everyday life. Wāhi tapu are specific places, things, spaces and sites throughout Aotearoa that hold special meaning for both local iwi of that particular area and Māori throughout the country. While these places might be acknowledged and appreciated by many New Zealanders, wāhi tapu are intimately connected to Māori identity as tangata whenua and have special spiritual and historical associations. Wāhi tapu can be a broad and rather ambiguous category in terms of translation as it includes not only features of the natural environment, such as lakes, forests and mountain ranges but tapu

(commonly translated to mean sacred) can extend to everyday activities too (Mead 2003). It is perhaps this variety of understanding of sacredness that can contribute to contentious and often awkward situations as different worldviews collide.

I am interested in the emotional attachment to sacred sites, spaces and places and the consequences for local hapu when their cultural sites are disrupted or threatened by residential and other forms of development. This research, therefore focuses on the current situation at Matata, a small coastal township in the Eastern Bay of Plenty. The discovery and unearthing of bones has been an on-going issue for local residents as the pressure for residential seaside property increases. This inevitably means clearing, flattening and contouring the land to make way for development which is becoming an increasing problem for local Māori (throughout Aotearoa) as this demand for prime real estate often coincides with areas regarded as wāhi tapu. This has been the case for iwi in and around Matata.

Matata is an interesting location. Situated approximately 30 kilometres from Whakatane in the Eastern Bay of Plenty, Matata makes up an important part of national history as it is the converging point of a number of iwi as well as being the location of one of the last documented accounts of inter-tribal battles (see figure one) (Boyack 1987). As a consequence, a large number of human bones are buried along the coastline and deep within the hillside (Whakapoukorero) adjacent to the town. In addition to increasing residential development, the town was subjected to massive flooding in May 2005, in which surges of mud, silt and debris stormed down the streams of Whakapoukorero (McSaveny *et al* 2005). This resulted in large-scale destruction, including the dislodgement and subsequent unearthing of ancestral bones in and around the Matata township.

Ongoing discoveries of bones 'out of place' and the effect on local Māori create the basis of this thesis. I take seriously the emotional and spiritual toll

of these incidents by offering some insight as to why Māori may feel a sense of distress and anxiety when their ancestral bones are disrupted. Key to understanding these reactions is recognising that these bones and spaces are regarded as highly tapu and are bound within a complex system of Mautauranga Māori, a particular worldview based on the intimate relationship between people and the land. Furthermore, intersecting and competing forms of knowledges concerning death, the human body and ways of perceiving the land contribute to cultural misunderstandings, conflict and on-going disputes over sacred spaces. It is from this assertion that has not only led to the establishment of the research objectives but also underpins the reasons for conducting this research in the first place.

The cultural confusion caused by the discovery of sacred human bones is under investigation in this thesis. In particular human emotions and personal insights, following events such as the subdivision of land and the 2005 flood, are my focus. This topic lends itself to contemporary geographical avenues such as the connection of land through ancestral links and its influence on identity and sense of 'home'. Contemporary geographical perspectives can also be applied such as the significance of cultural associations of 'the body' and human reactions to death and grief (Davidson *et al* 2005)

The overall aim then, is to explore the current issues surrounding the discovery of these ancestral bones from Māori and cultural geography perspectives and how it has affected a sense of identity both within local iwi and the greater Matata community. I examine how these personal and community responses and experiences can sometimes intersect with western institutional responses which favour 'scientific' and 'rational' systems of thought<sup>1</sup>. Focusing on the ways in which 'sacredness' is included within national frameworks like the Resource Management Act as viewed from the

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<sup>1</sup> In this context I refer to 'institution' as including academic interest in Matata such as archaeology as well as local authorities such as Councils.

community members themselves is important to improve and encourage co-operative relationships between iwi and local authorities.

I have developed the following key objectives in an attempt to work through some of these complex issues:

1. to understand Māori meanings given to wāhi tapu at Matata and the influence of certain events such as the 2005 flood
2. to examine critically the socio-cultural consequences of disrupted wāhi tapu
3. to examine the relationship between power, sacred sites, bones and the body

#### **Matata: 'An historical treasure chest'**

Situated approximately thirty kilometres northwest of Whakatane along the Eastern Bay of Plenty coastline, Matata is a coastal township which currently has a population of nearly 700 (Statistics New Zealand 2007). It is an area steeped with historical significance for Aotearoa. Before European settlement the coastline provided an access way to the foreshore through the sea inlet, currently referred to by many local iwi as Te Awa o te Atua. It is the converging point which various iwi occupy, stemming from the historical events such as the Tarawera eruption and the battle of Kaokaoroa in 1864. These iwi include Tuwharetoa, Te Arawa, Ngati Rangitihi and Ngati Awa and their respective hapu. One local resident referred to Matata as an 'historical treasure chest' as it is an area that retains memories of various sacred events and sites to the surrounding iwi (participant 2). The following sub section concentrates on the battle of Kaokaoroa and its significance as a historical

event for New Zealand as well as being a burial ground for many of the people slain during the battle.

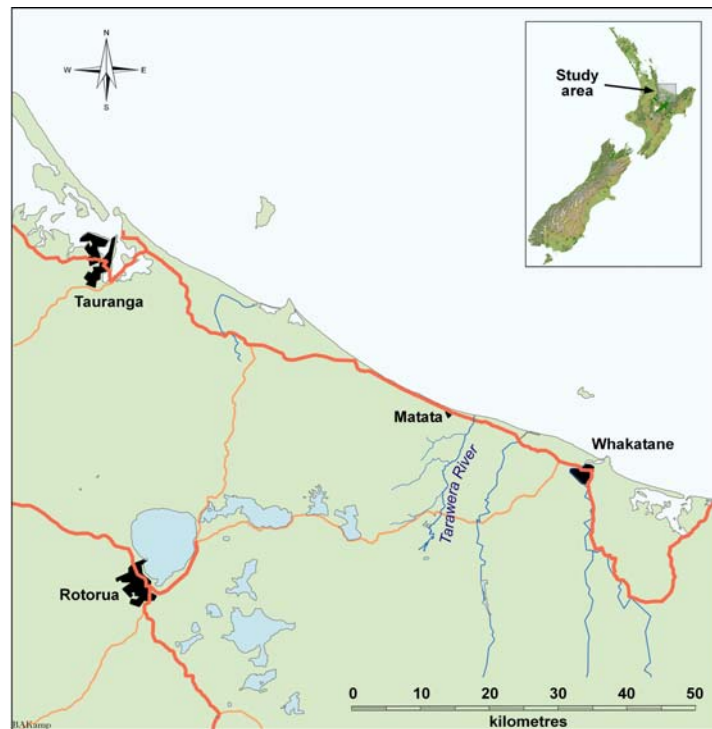


Figure one: Map of Bay of Plenty showing location of Matata, New Zealand.  
Source: B.A Kamp (2006)

### ***The Battle of Kaokaoroa***

The year 1864 signifies a milestone in Māori warfare history for it was the battle of Kaokaoroa that has become synonymous with the identity of Matata and the wider Eastern Bay of Plenty. The area known today as Kaokaoroa extends from the eastern end of the Matata township along the coastline to Maketu. According to an informant from my previous research, Kaokaoroa (long rib bone) was named by Toroa, chief of the Mataatua waka (see Brown 2006). The battle originated as a response by Crown soldiers to the presence of Tairawhiti, Ngati Awa, Whakatohea, Tuhoe and Te Whānau-a-Apanui who were forging up the coastline towards Waikato to aid in the attempt to prevent further land confiscation (Ngati Awa Settlement Act 2005). The Government

troops had acquired the support of Te Arawa. As the fighting raged on, many men (mostly Māori) were killed in this relatively brief but violent and bloody battle. As a result of the battle, major changes occurred concerning the social relations among local iwi and between Māori and the Pakeha colonisers (Boyack 1987).

The area was originally known as Te Awa o te Atua but after the battle it was renamed the town of Richmond after Major R.C Richmond, the Native Minister in 1867. The British colonisers hastily infiltrated the area where the cooperation of Te Arawa in the battle was rewarded with land transfers for services rendered. The town was also redeveloped to reflect the wave of British settlers by claiming and renaming streets after prominent British soldiers as well as reaffirming the Te Arawa allegiance by allocating certain street names (Belshaw 2005). Because of its access to the sea and its internal river systems, the town of Richmond quickly transformed into an economic hub. It became the centre for local market activities such as timber and hemp production (Boyack 1987). With the development of surrounding towns such as Whakatane the council together with the Ministry of Works undertook a massive drainage scheme between 1911 and 1925 in an attempt to free more agricultural land for an expanding population. This resulted in the two major rivers (Rangitaiki and Tarawera) being redirected cutting off their natural flow to Te Awa o te Atua, a significant wāhi tapu to all surrounding iwi (appendix five) (Gibbons 1990). Local Māori reclaimed the town of Richmond and renamed it Matata after an old historic pa (Boyack 1987).

Landmarks such as Kaokaoroa are crucial to the history of the iwi involved. It acts as a physical and spiritual reminder of the presence of the gods, memory of tipuna and identity of today's people. Kaokaoroa has been acknowledged by the Crown as being a site of particular cultural, spiritual and traditional importance to Māori of Matata, and it states "the mauri of Te Kaokaoroa reserve represents the essence that binds the physical and spiritual elements of all things together, generating and upholding life" (Ngati Awa Claims

Settlement Act 2005). The importance of Kaokaoroa will be revisited in latter sections as it is an important wāhi tapu within Matata and is central to current disputes over the unearthing of ancestral bones.

### **A personal explanation of why I chose to research sacred spaces of Matata**

Entering graduate study, I, like many eager students, wanted to pursue research that was both meaningful and worthwhile. I wanted to concentrate on an issue that would ‘take me back home’ and that was related to Māori and environmental planning, an area I am passionate about. After the devastating flood which struck Matata in 2005, the community was faced with some complicated planning issues like how to clean up the town, whether to rebuild and how to protect the town from future events. This sparked my interest into the role and response of the local authorities towards local iwi concern over the damage to wāhi tapu. At the centre of these debates was the need to protect these sites from further damage.

My directed study, titled *Environmental Knowledges in Aotearoa: a qualitative enquiry into the significance of waahi tapu and the Matata flood* explored the degree to which Māori knowledge was valued as a legitimate form of knowledge within natural hazard frameworks in New Zealand. Korero with kaumatua and Māori residents revealed the emotional distress and sense of discontentment with the state of their wāhi tapu and reference was often made to the bones that had been unearthed during the flood. However given the limited scope of enquiry, I was unable to explore this latter issue in any great detail. After completing this research I felt an overwhelming sense of ‘unfinished mahi’. I felt an obligation to the people who had contributed to this research as well as to myself as a member of Nga Maihi (see page 41) to extend this line of enquiry further to investigate the unearthing of ancestral bones from a Māori perspective. This, plus the positive encouragement I received from former research Participants is what motivated me to extend this original line of research.



## **Chapter Outline**

In this chapter I have introduced the notion of sacredness. More specifically, I highlight the importance of sacred sites, places and things to Māori culture and how disruption of these spaces can create a sense of distress, especially where ancestral bones are unearthed or disturbed. Firstly I have introduced Matata by providing some context into the historical significance of the area as well as introducing an important historical event (the Battle of Kaokaoroa) which is central to the debate over the unearthing of ancestral bones. This helps demonstrate why Matata is an interesting location to examine some of the complicated issues surrounding the discovery of bones and the consequences of conflicting perspectives and worldviews. With this in mind, I establish my research objectives. Lastly I offer a personal explanation as to why I have chosen to research sacred spaces of Matata. The remainder of this chapter outlines the main points of the following chapters.

In chapter two I explain why I have incorporated the concept of scale as a means of organising my thesis into a logical order before exploring existing literature on sacredness. I then highlight the influence of western hegemonic thought within contemporary society by concentrating on the effect that binary thinking can have on people's perceptions of the world. Geographers concerned with current social issues (politics, ethnicity, gender, sexuality etc) continue to deconstruct this system of thought in creating exclusionary and Othered spaces. I specifically discuss binaries in relation to the privileged position of western knowledge while, consequently, demoting other forms of knowledge. Thirdly I explain why I believe it is a worthy area of scholarship especially within Aotearoa given the number of cases where development (residential and other types) coincides with areas recognised as wāhi tapu. I then demonstrate how researching bones, death and the sacred can be approached through merging together the theoretical strands of cultural and emotional geography as well as being suited for the incorporation of tikanga Māori.

The third chapter is dedicated to working through the process of conducting kaupapa Māori and acknowledging that there are specific considerations that researchers need to consider. I elaborate on my position within the research by discussing my affiliation to Matata through my whakapapa before explaining the usefulness of establishing a research whānau to help guide the research. I then detail the actual data collection process such as how I went about contacting potential participants and the techniques I used to gather information. I also note in this section some of the difficult issues involved with researching the sacred and the personal ethical dilemmas I experienced throughout the research process.

Understanding the meaning attributed to sacred spaces of Matata is the central focus of the fourth chapter. I discuss death, the human body and the relationship with ancestors from a Māori point of view through the contributions of my research Participants who share their own personal feelings towards the unearthing and disturbance of ancestral bones. I include secondary sources to demonstrate the currency of this issue within Matata and the emotional toll it is having on the Māori community.

Entitled “Regulating the sacred”, chapter five delves into the unearthing of bones from an institutional point of view. I examine critically the eurocentric undercurrents that have, and in many cases continue to, influence the practices of archaeology and other institutional organisations such as local authorities. To help work through some of these complex issues, I explore the concept of ‘liminal spaces’ and embedded notions of public and private boundaries. I discuss how certain social behaviour can blur the boundaries between what is considered sacred and non-sacred. I argue in this chapter that unpredictable and chaotic circumstances such as natural disasters can confuse these boundaries even further. I include reference to some important legislation that specifically relates to wāhi tapu such as the Treaty of Waitangi and the Resource Management Act and comment on some of the limitations of these statutes in terms of implementation.

I dedicate the last section to silences. By silences I mean concentrating on what is *not* said. I bring to attention the seemingly incompatible ideas about knowledge and mapping between Māori and western institutions which can lead to a number of power-laden issues of control, access and right of determination of sacred sites, places and things in Aotearoa. It is in this section that I also discuss the purpose of 'silent files' as a means of an informal protection mechanism. The concluding chapter is an opportunity to sum up the main points of my thesis and to draw out the main themes of the research.

## **Chapter two**

### **Researching the sacred**

The topic of 'sacredness' and indigenous belief systems can be viewed from numerous theoretical angles. Traditionally the knowledge realm of archaeology, sacred sites and spirituality are now being approached from other academic disciplines such as anthropology and psychology. Religion and sacredness are two relatively new territories for geographers. This interest is sparked by the wealth of knowledge that can be gained by exploring the social and cultural connections between land, identity and sacred spaces which are recognized as being valuable factors in people's attachment to, and affiliation with, particular areas and regions of the world (Kong 1990, Collins-Kreiner 2006). However, geographers have been slow to explore the meaning of sacredness in any great detail, with the exception of contemporary geographers such as August (2005) and Yeoh (1999) who contribute to this area of scholarship by approaching sacred spaces and landscapes from particular cultural positions. The inevitability of death of the human body continues to fascinate and complicate these academic discussions.

Given the frequency of cases in Aotearoa where wāhi tapu are found in areas planned for residential development (particularly coastal areas) (Peart date unknown), it is disappointing that there remains a gap in the literature that directly addresses the unearthing of ancestral bones in Aotearoa. I found quite a substantial collection on Māori customs of death and tapu of the body and reference to wāhi tapu was often mentioned in planning/legislation type documents published by esteemed Māori academics and organisations (Te Puni Kōkiri 1996). These sources proved to be useful in establishing an initial broad direction for this thesis as well as introducing me to additional Māori commentators and sources. The 'gap' in the literature appears to be in relation to situations within Aotearoa where seemingly various cultural

approaches and practices to death and the human body intersect. I find this surprising given the frequency of media accounts concerning disputes between local iwi and potential developers<sup>2</sup>. This observation extends to other indigenous cultures of the world as well (Carmichael 1994).

This research crosses over the theoretical terrains of emotional geography and cultural geography. Mixed within these 'umbrella' terms is the notion of embodiment theories and kaupapa Māori. The partnership of these contemporary perspectives offers a unique lens in which to examine closely topics of sacredness, cross-cultural approaches to death and the human body. Theories of embodiment and kaupapa Māori will be examined and their relevance to the research discussed, but perhaps more importantly, it is my objective to discuss how these two perspectives can merge together to provide a complex and theoretically significant contribution to this area of study.

I begin with a discussion into recognising the influence of binaries when discussing ideas about sacredness before commenting on the usefulness of approaching this topic through the lens of cultural geography. What makes this area of scholarship particularly valuable is that it welcomes the incorporation of other (often marginalised) knowledges. Here I discuss the centrality of tikanga (such as the incorporation of tapu) to a Māori worldview. I refer to other Māori academics who discuss notions of sacredness and spirituality as well as discussing the connection to land and how this worldview contributes to a particular perspective concerning the unearthing of ancestral bones. I then explore an emerging sub-discipline of geography known as emotional geography. I join other geographers such as Deborah Thien, Joyce Davidson and Christine Milligan by advocating for emotions to

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<sup>2</sup> See Harmsworth 2005 for another example of a highly publicised example in New Zealand where the construction of the part of the Waikato Expressway was halted as a result of local iwi protest. Iwi were concerned that the expressway would interfere with "a significant cultural Taniwha and wetland site" (1).

be taken seriously and for emotional enquiry to be included within research. Especially research that involves intimate and emotional topics such as mine. Fourthly I state why studying the sacred can contribute to geography and note some of the existing work in this area. Because the notion of sacredness often involves cultural ideas about death, I also explore western perspectives of death by reviewing some current literature on the subject.

This thesis is organized using the geographic concept of scale. Valentine (2001) insists that scale is a “useful way of organizing or thinking about geographical differentiation” (8) and is particularly useful for exploring occurrences “between different kinds of places” (8). Like Valentine (2001) I use the concept of scale to investigate sacred sites starting with the body and tikanga that surrounds notions of death and sacredness as well as community responses. I then widen the scale in order to look at institutional responses to sacred spaces in Aotearoa. Using this type of scale helps organize these important components into a manageable framework allowing for different cultural and social ideas concerning sacredness to be examined. Given that protection of wāhi tapu is an ongoing and often contentious issue in this country, it seems appropriate to explore this issue from an individual and community level and how these opinions, perspectives and worldviews may be affected by and effect national legislation. Valentine (2001) cautions against thinking of these scales as fixed or predetermined categories, rather it is useful to think of scales as fluid and subject to variability. They are “constituted in and through their relations and linkages with ‘elsewhere’, with spaces that stretch beyond them” (2001 9). The notion of scale works well when attempting to disrupt hegemonic binary categories. While it could be easy to align different scales according to their perceived binary position, Valentine suggests that inclusion of scale actually works to demonstrate the fluidity and flexibility within these scales. Neil Smith (1993) suggests that this can be empowering as people can ‘jump scales’ to “resist oppression and exploitation at a higher scale, over a wider geographical scale” (90). Valentine

believes that “in this way, scale is a means of not only containment and exclusions but also of expansion and inclusion” (2001 9).

While various scales are flexible and subject to change, Valentine makes a pertinent comment when considering cultural ideas, beliefs and worldviews:

this is not to suggest that boundaries are not completely irrelevant. The multiplicity of times and spaces (and their superimposition) which exist *within geographical scales, and the relationships and interdependencies which exist between them, can be sources of tension and conflict* (2001 9 – emphasis added).

The second section of this quotation indicates the usefulness of scale in terms of this research considering that much of the *tension and conflict* that exists with the wider community of Matata can be attributed to the variation of knowledge systems *which exist within and between geographical scales*, both between iwi, between community members and between institutions such as the local council.

### **Hegemonic western thought**

Critique of western epistemology and binary associations echo throughout the works of critical social scientists since its theoretical emergence in the early 16<sup>th</sup> century. Associated with the works from early philosophical scholars such as Plato, Aristotle and Descartes, this dualistic thinking has become so deeply engrained within the ideological psyche of contemporary western knowledge that its infamous legacy continue to dictate dominant thought systems within the western world (Cloke & Johnston 2005).

Critical cultural geographers work to expose the power associated with dualistic thinking that positions some as self (and dominant) and some as Other (and inferior) (Kobayashi 2003). Appreciating the ideological weight of this system of thinking can aid in understanding how culturally significant events can escalate to emotionally charged social situations as different

knowledge systems collide. I join this ever growing academic concentration by connecting the link between dualist thinking and the seemingly incompatibility of western and Māori approaches to sacredness. Dualistic pairing of aspects of human experience is relevant to all sections of this research. For example, some commonly referred to categories such as mind/body, culture/nature, rational/emotional, disembodied/embodied, western/Māori worldviews all play a role and inform my research. The dominant left-hand category is what is so troublesome to geographers in terms of the negative effect on their perceived 'opposites' (Cloke & Johnston 2005). It is the problematic binary of western and Māori (the latter can be extended to a broader category of indigenous populations) that underpins this entire thesis. It is my objective to challenge the meta-discourse which positions western disembodied knowledge more dominantly than other alternative forms of knowledges concerning sacredness and spirituality. I want to highlight the hegemony of binaries to expose the way this dichotomous way of thinking complicates responses to sacred sites and the subsequent consequences for Māori concerning wāhi tapu.

While it may seem that I am essentialising Western society into one homogenous group, my intention is to draw upon theorists that have dedicated much of their time to deconstructing the influence of the deeply ingrained ideologies (see Bradbury 1999, Williamson & Shneidman 1995). I do this to demonstrate that while death and the body may be subject to cultural, religious and spiritual filters, western ideologies that have emerged from the Enlightenment period can still play a major role in the way people perceive and respond to human bones. New Zealand, being as multicultural as it is, provides a context to explore the issue of competing, hybrid and complicated issues surrounding approaches to the discovery of ancestral bones (Schwass 2005).

Deconstructing binaries has been a popular tool amongst critical geographers (see Cloke & Johnston 2005) as it can be a useful analytical method in which



to open up new areas of thought, areas where binaries overlap and to confuse or disrupt the illusion of fixed and stable categories. Cloke and Johnston (2005) add “ the move to deconstruction, then, replaces binary thinking with more fluid conversations within which new language and politics of identity and possibility can emerge” (16).

It is helpful to trace the influence of binaries back to its emergence in the Enlightenment era of the 18<sup>th</sup> Century. This period saw the establishment of a particular school of thought based on the quest for knowledge. Influenced by Christian underpinnings of human domination over the environment but also ironically dissatisfied with the reliance of ‘irrational’ spiritual underpinnings of Christian theology, science took over. The world was perceived as existing through scientific and mathematical laws. The world was systematically divided into more ‘manageable parts’. Scholars of this era became preoccupied with fragmenting the earth into atoms, electrons and particles (Merchant 1996). The world was segregated into binaries where reference to spiritual connections and other perceived ‘anti-science’ views were set in opposition and conceptualized as being inferior to those afforded to the dominant category such as science (Jones 2003). It is through this mix of patriarchal reliance on science coupled with the introduction of the “industrial revolution, market economies and/or Judeo Christian philosophies” (Howitt & Suchet-Pearson 2003 557) that created a discourse which viewed the natural world from an anthropocentric position. The ‘natural’ environment presented a means to fulfil societal needs and wants through exploitation (Merchant 1996). Scholarly knowledge was a main contributor in the production of these knowledges of the world and even though critical academics of the early 19<sup>th</sup> century began to question the groundings of dominant scientific philosophy and its claims of being ‘all-knowing’, the undercurrents of such a dominant system of thinking still flows through contemporary thought. It is these embedded structures that cultural geographers are interested in, how they influence contemporary geography and also how they motivate post-colonial and critical perspectives. Anderson and Domosh *et al.* (2003) insist that

geographers concerned with social action and critical theory should remain aware of dualist couplings. The following thought is particularly fitting in terms of the importance of reflexive appraisal from researchers:

(researchers)...should explore practical, theoretical and methodological implications of ontological pluralism because landscapes of *cultural conflict* are as much about *different knowledge systems* as about *contested claims to land, identity, resources and livelihood* (557) (*my emphasis*).

They go on to state that cultural geographers:

should consider these implications of multiple knowledges (ontological diversity) and should seek to unsettle and challenge the dominance of eurocentrism which affects even the new cultural geography, by taking seriously the philosophical experience of indigenous groups (557).

Matata is a site of *cultural conflict* and is caught up in an intersection of varying *knowledge systems*. It is, therefore, important to observe how traditional cultural practices inform contemporary Māori views towards *claims to land, identity, resources and livelihood* in relation to sacred sites and how opposing views (western discourses) contribute to contested spaces within Aotearoa.

I want to draw attention to the most obvious of binaries referred to throughout this thesis, Māori/western (pakeha) responses to sacredness. By constantly referring to them both covertly and inadvertently can give the impression that they are somehow fixed or predetermined categories. To do so without any further discussion would be ignorant to the myriad and hybridity of identities that exist within these two oversimplified categories. Both cultures are made up of a host of people from various religious, class, cultural and spiritual identities who adopt varying opinions and perspectives about the world around them. New Zealand is a multicultural country where many cultural elements merge and bind together (Schwass 2005). For these reasons it is useful to concentrate on hybrid space, the “middle ground” (Cloeke & Johnston

2005 15) that exists *between* binaries. Often referred to as “third space” or “third ground” (Soja 1996), this involves exploring “spaces that transcend what is produced by binary processes” (Cloke & Johnston 2005 15) and concentrate on the overlapping areas of binaries. This undermines the perceived solidity of, and distance between, binary categories. It is important to make clear that while it may appear that in my attempt to deconstruct the western/Māori knowledge binary I am actually replacing it with a new binary (promoting Māori knowledge as the dominant discourse). This in itself is a problematic venture, however, at the same time it is also important to bear in mind the significance of categorizing the world around us and as Cloke and Johnston (2005) point out “such categorization need not be a negative or regressive force” (13). Jenkins (2000), for example, insists that “categorization is unavoidable in knowing the social world, and in all social identification ... Categorization can be positive and valorizing” (20), especially when concerned with social justice and identity issues. For these reasons it is, paradoxically useful to both critique and utilize binary categories.

It has been a popular trend for geographers to apply and critique the influence of binaries to their particular area of study. In his book *Geographies of exclusion: society and difference in the west* (1995), David Sibley integrates the influence of binaries to demonstrate the deeply ingrained effect that binary association can have in creating, maintaining (re) negotiating the of boundaries of “self” and “society” (Cresswell 1997 566). This research demonstrates the processes of boundary making in everyday life. I have found Sibley’s work to be useful because it helps make sense of people’s ideas of ‘home’. Sibley understands peoples sense of ‘home’ to be related to the distinction between public and private boundaries. It is within these boundaries that can create a feeling of “security and comfort” (1995 32). However he also suggests that that these boundaries are not in any way fixed, leaving them susceptible to threat from the ‘outside’ which can cause

angst and uncertainty<sup>3</sup>. Furthermore, it is a useful tool to explore people's affiliations to sacred spaces and the tangible and intangible boundaries that are constructed in these spaces. Sibley offers the notion of 'liminal spaces' – those ambiguous spaces that exist at the borders of binary logic. He uses this idea to better understand the periphery and slipperiness of these categories/spaces and the social and cultural impact on people who are aligned or associated with these ambiguous spaces.

I have already mentioned some of the prevailing binaries that weave throughout discussions of sacred spaces in Aotearoa. While this western classification system may seem unusual, it is simply (and powerfully) another way of understanding the ways in which certain social and cultural factors are organised and grouped. The following diagram demonstrates some of the 'categories' that are central to this thesis:

<b>A (Privileged)</b>	<b>Not -A (Othered)</b>
Pakeha	Maori
public	private
rationality	emotion
science	religion (spirituality)
eurocentric thought	indigenous thought
'everyday' spaces	wāhi tapu

Figure two: Binary categories Source: Adapted from Johnston 2007

Sibley's discussion on exclusionary spaces merges nicely with another well known geographical term "paradoxical spaces". Commonly referenced to

<sup>3</sup> In chapter three of "*Geographies of Exclusion*" Sibley (1995) talks more about the theoretical concept of boundary making and applies it to the 'home' in which he states "To the occupier, the home may represent a space clearly separated from the outside. Inside the home the owner or tenant may feel that space is ordered according to his or her values. However, problems can be created by entrances, breaches in the boundaries of the home. The entrance, hallway or passage provides a link between the private and the public, but constitutes an ambiguous zone where the private/public boundary is unclear and in need of definition and regulation in order to remove the anxiety of the occupier (33). This example will appear more relevant in chapter five when I discuss the effects of unpredictable events such as natural disasters and how they can further confuse personal and public boundaries.

Gillian Rose (1993), it is a term that has been adopted by many social and cultural geographers who are committed to exposing the 'in-between spaces' that can easily occur when conducting research. While Rose predominantly uses the notion of paradoxical spaces to describe the often contradictory and complicatedness of practicing feminist geography within a discipline that has been subject to "various forms of white, bourgeois, heterosexual masculinity"<sup>4</sup> (Rose 1993 137), many other geographers have used the same concept but adopted its premises to other social specific contexts (see Bell 1995, Butz & Berg 2002, Mahtani 2001 and Valentine & Skelton 2003). Throughout this thesis that too utilise the concept of paraxial space in various ways. As the name indicates, it is used by geographers like myself who are interested or find themselves caught (in) between a whole host of multiple and overlapping categories positions (regarding ethnic identity, class, sexuality, politics etc) and the internal and external consequences of these occupations. First I note my 'own paraxial space' (see page 47) but I also apply this notion in to describe the sometimes paradoxical position of Maori in terms of protecting their cultural sites in (see page 106).

### **Cultural Geography**

This research crosses a number of disciplinary fields as it draws from existing work by anthropologists, archaeologists, psychologists and contributions from Māori academics. However, I approach this topic guided by the theoretical premise of cultural geography. Of the many definitions of cultural geography, Pamela Shumer Smith offers a contemporary version which helps situate and justify how this research topic fits within it. According to her, cultural geography is a

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<sup>4</sup> There are many publications by feminist geographers who discuss in detail the influence of masculine on the discipline of geography. I have only briefly touched on the topic here to introduce the term "paradoxical space", however for much more detailed and thought provoking publications on Feminist Geography see Moss 2002, McDowell 1992 and Desbiens 1999.

...field of study which concentrates upon the ways in which *space, place and the environment participate in an unfolding dialogue of meaning*. This indicates thinking about how geographical phenomena are shaped, worked and apportioned according to ideology: how they are used when people form and express their relationship and ideas, including their sense of who they are... (2002 3 - my emphasis).

This highlights a number of important points specific to the influential role of cultural tradition and belief systems which mould how people interpret and respond to universal commonalities such as spirituality, death and sacredness (Mead 2003). Within Māori culture, *space, place and the environment* are fundamental components of a holistic cycle which holds birth, life and death central to Māori identity. A major objective of contemporary cultural geography is to unravel the power relations that inform dominant discourses and the implications or consequences of those discursive powers in privileging certain kinds of knowledges while excluding others. It also focuses on how these discourses are interpreted by others who sit 'outside' of that particular dominant system of thinking. This objective of cultural geography is a central theme that weaves through the various chapters of this thesis, that is, how traditional Māori belief systems concerning wāhi tapu and ancestral bones emerge from different paradigms of thought and are therefore perceived to sit in opposition to western mechanistic views of the land and the environment within contemporary society.

To better understand this idea involves looking closely at the influence of dichotomous thinking within western society and how these powerful discourses help mould, shape and maintain particular worldviews concerning sacredness and the consequences of this way of thinking on those who are discursively constructed as the 'Other' (Cloke & Johnstone 2005). Since these approaches have been established as dominant discourses of western knowledge systems, instances where indigenous systems appear to contradict or offer alternative ways of understanding the world continue to

create difficult situations. The situation at Matata is a current example of the tensions created between Māori communities and institutions such as local councils and provides an opportunity to examine the cultural consequences of these often opposing belief systems by focusing on the affects of unearthed ancestral bones to local iwi (see Brown 2006).

Given that this research focuses on Māori perspectives of sacredness, spirituality and identity I draw upon the works of Māori commentators such as Mead (2003), Tuhiwai Smith (1999) and Bishop (1998) as well as more generic sources on traditional indigenous belief systems within contemporary society (see Johnston 1992 and Love 1997). In this way, the components of a cultural geography perspective can be applied in partnership with tikanga Māori to create a unique and culturally specific account of sacred spaces to Māori in Aotearoa.

### **Tikanga Māori**

The deeply embedded importance of tapu is central to this topic, however providing an actual 'definition' of tapu is difficult given its variation of meanings in different contexts (Mead 2003). Because of its centrality, it is appropriate to position Māori custom and tradition as a focus point in the literature review process. This is important as it highlights the degree to which 'sacredness' flows through, and is incorporated into every facet of Māori society. It was encouraging to discover the wealth of information regarding tapu and more specifically, wāhi tapu and its importance in terms of Māori identity. Reference to this was usually cited in generic sources concerning tikanga Māori (see Mead 2003) however I did find documents that discuss the importance of sacred sites to the wellbeing of Māori which referred to areas within the current legislation (The Treaty of Waitangi, The Historic Places Trust and The Resource Management Act) and critically evaluated the current role of local Māori in environmental planning (see Te Puni Kokiri 1996, Adhar 2003 and Te Atiawa 2001). However, sources that directly deal with the notion of sacredness and deeper, more personal spiritual matters are

relatively limited. Reference to the meaning of death from a spiritual point of view tended to be included in international publications which refer to Māori relationship with sacred sites and locations as part of a collaboration of indigenous perspectives and again, tended to be general information as opposed to narratives of personal experiences. The fact that there remain minimal sources from Māori scholars is perhaps testament to the culturally sensitive nature of wāhi tapu. Silencing and protection of knowledge is a topic that weaves throughout my thesis as it is vitally important in the debate over information about, and public access to, wāhi tapu and is a common theme in many cross-cultural disputes.

### ***Connection to the land***

Most attempts to describe the intimate relationship between Māori and the land and how it influences a shared sense of identity to local iwi inevitably involve revisiting creation stories stemming from Ranginui (sky father) and Papatūānuku (earth mother). The objective of re-telling the creation of te Ao is to better understand the link between Māori attitudes toward ancestral bones with a deeper spiritual understanding of the environment and ancestral affiliation.

The sacredness and eternal affection towards the natural environment stems from the creation of te Ao and the link to the primeval parents, Ranginui and Papatūānuku (Mead 2003). Mead (2003) insists that any discussion into the meaning of tapu, the human body and relationship to the land needs to be done in a way that traces the connection back to these ancestral parents. In all Māori creation stories, the origin of life on the earth began after the separation of this couple by their children. Led by Tane, the children of Ranginui and Papatūānuku embarked on a mission to separate their parents in order to free themselves from their captive embrace. It was this separation that breathed life and shed light into the world and ended the state of Te Kore (the nothingness) (Cadagon 2004). The children then parted company to adopt different realms of the environment and acted as spiritual guardians



which protected and controlled these realms. The allocation of these “departmental gods” (Gale 1998 14) were reflective of the children’s individual personalities, for example, Tawhirimatea became the spiritual atua for the wind which represented his hasty and aggressive persona while Rūaumoko, (Papatūānuku’s youngest child) who stayed with his mother during the separation and continues to cause the earth to tremor when he moves (Mead 2003) <sup>5</sup>.

Early Māori traditions and rituals regarding the powers of these atua were passed on through generations by constant acknowledgment of these guardians in everyday activity. This was of the utmost importance for the spiritual wellbeing of the iwi and was displayed by specific protocol and ritualistic events which sought permission and protection from these atua while amidst their respective domains. It is this active and conscious presence of atua that contributes to a uniquely Māori view that does not separate or elevate the human world above the spiritual and physical worlds. There exists no definitive boundary between the human and natural world (Mataira 2000). Discussions into the origins of a Māori perspective to land are relevant to all sections of this thesis as it is the fundamental component which permeates through many levels of a Māori approach to environmental management (physical, spiritual, emotional etc). To understand the land ‘objectively’ or as a ‘separate’ entity is a foreign and almost impossible task for Māori as it is all part of a connected cycle that is mutually constitutive. In Māoridom, the connection to the landscape and land is crucial. It goes beyond a purely physical attachment or space that one occupies. It is central to Māori identity and remains a link to whakapapa and gives a sense of belonging through spiritual ties to ancestral mountains, waka, iwi, hapu and whānau. In traditional times, land made up a significant part of Māori societal orientation as it helped distinguish tribal boundaries as well as uniting all Māori as children of Papatūānuku. Natural resources were seen as communal

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<sup>5</sup> This is a simplified description of a much more detailed account of Maori Mythology. For a more in-depth description see Reed 2004 and Orbell 1995.

property to which respect and due care were essential ingredients for survival. The land had immense value as a living 'being', alive and breathing, and was 'regarded as a sacred trust and asset of the people as a whole' (Asher and Naulls 1987 3). The term tangata whenua literally means 'people of the land' indicating the intimate relationship shared between the land and the people, a relationship that unlike Western ideology is not based on binary divisions of 'culture' and 'nature'. This recognition permeates Māori culture and stems from the acknowledgment of Papatūānuku as earth mother and the natural elements created by her offspring.

Many indigenous cultures of the world experience similar attitudes towards the land and understand its significance in providing a sense of belongingness and identity. It is often referred to as sacred and part of a holistic system. The following quote demonstrates the importance of land and its relationship with social, cultural and environmental factors for many indigenous societies:

There is a real appreciation of and appreciation for the *sacredness of land*. More specifically, for the sacred nature of places... *the sacredness of land is first and foremost an emotional experience*. It is that feeling of unity with a place...we begin to mediate on who we are, what our society is, where we came from, quite possibly where we are going and what it all means. Land somehow, calls forth these questions and gives us a feeling of being within something larger and more powerful than ourselves (Deloria 1993 29 – emphasis added).

This is often in contrast to western orthodox representations of the human and natural world which is predominantly based upon a number of influencing discourses such as Judaic principles of Christianity and a dominant market-driven economy. The coupling of these types of ideologies can result in a western approach to the land where human life is referred to as superior over natural and animal forms and the natural land and resources perceived as resources for human exploitation (Merchant 1996).

## **A space for the sacred in Geography**

The term sacred is difficult to explain, define or theorize, however the importance and central role it plays in societies have motivated a variety of academic responses. Holloway and Valins (2002) insist that:

Religious and spiritual matters form an important context through which the majority of the world's population live their lives, forge a sense (indeed an ethics) of self, and make and perform their different geographies" (2).

This statement reinforces the importance of spirituality and legitimizes it as a worthwhile and useful area of scholarship.

Many of the existing work in this area explores religious or cultural factors to highlight the complexity of cross-cultural explanations of sacredness from an anthropological perspective (Carmichael 1994, Derlon and Mauze date unknown and Tacon 1999). These discussions highlight the importance of death, the human body and the rituals or traditional customs that accompany these phases. Archaeologists also contribute to these discussions by attempting to unravel the details of ancient burial practices of various cultures. While a number of academics (Buikstra and Charles 1999, Nicholas, Klesert & Anyon 1999, Smith and Wobst 2005, Far 2002 and Hubert 1992) have challenged the intrusiveness of these practices, both disciplines have provided useful groundwork material for this research and have revealed and sparked interest in other important issues relevant to the wider ethical and moral behaviour concerning the discovery of ancient ancestral bones. The majority of these publications do not specifically refer to the situation in Aotearoa, however a number show similarities in terms of Indigenous perspectives concerning the cultural significance of land and ancient ancestors which mirror Māori belief systems so they can be cross-applied. So where are the geographers in these discussions? While geographers have examined the meaning of landscape and the role of religion, Kong (1990) believes that there are still many avenues concerning spirituality that offer

potentially fruitful insights especially in relation to political power relations that exist within a multi cultural and multi religious world (see Levine 1986, Holloway & Valins 2002 and Park 1994 & 2004).

This topic overlaps with another crucial issue, the continual tension between science and indigenous rights (Jones and Harris 1998) and it is these debates that directly correlate to situations in Aotearoa. On a national scale, iwi around the country have been faced with the struggle to protect wāhi tapu from urban development (see Addar 2003 and Harmsworth 2005). Matata provides an interesting example of a small community who is not only trying to rebuild and recover their town from the aftermath of the 2005 flood but is also dealing with complicated planning issues concerning the preservation of wāhi tapu and the displacement of human ancestral bones. This has opened up an opportunity to add to existing literature on sacredness by approaching it from a cultural geographical perspective. Jones and Harris (1998) elaborate this point by stating that:

little attention has been devoted to the relationship between approaches to human skeletal remains and to dead human bodies. As a result, discussions of skeletal remains tend to *occur in isolation and fail to benefit from a consideration of values considered relevant in related areas* (253 –my emphasis)).

An example of these *other values considered relevant in related areas* is an appreciation of indigenous perspectives and the highly influential meaning imbued in sacred spaces/places and landscapes and its connection with identity. This appears to be a topic long overdue for discussion by geographers.

### **Researching Death**

It is important to explore some of the theories put forward concerning the psychological underpinnings of a western perspective of death in order to better understand the variety of opinions and perspectives that exist. Every

culture experiences grief and a sense of loss in a number of ways (Schwass 2005). Scholars such as Bradbury (1999), Yeoh (1999) and Hallam, Hockey and Howarth (1999) are interested in the social processes of death and have contributed extensively to the literature from a range of varied perspectives in which it seems a shared objective is to deconstruct existing dominant ideologies of death within Western society.

Death has been a rather uncomfortable subject throughout history in Western societies. It is a topic that has been traditionally shrouded with fear and uncertainty and generally caste in a negative light (Hallam, Hockey and Howarth 1999). Elizabeth Hallam *et al.* discuss this idea in their book *Beyond the body, death and social identity* (1999). As the title suggests, they explore the social and cultural influences in an attempt to explain why western culture views death and associated matters the way it does. They link this perspective to the ideological shift from Christian ideals to an ideology based on materialism, autonomy and individual gain (Synott 1992). Hallem (1999) *et al.* elaborate this point by aligning this shift in thought to the effect on the body;

where once the body was understood to be the vehicle of the soul, it is now afforded central significance in the construction of the self ... In the current system, the dead body is the signifier of the loss of self and the loss of individuality - the material reality of death. As such, the dead body now has a destabilising impact (127).

It is this 'destabilizing impact' that has very real effects on western ideas about death. A society who is preoccupied with control, security and management of its members, is suddenly threatened by this event which is understood to be out of anybody's control and this reminder of death "represents an indelible loss of self and individuality" (125). People are constantly reminded of the realness of death which has created a discourse that has been pushed to the periphery of western society and has created what Schwass (2005) describes as a "death-denying world" (14). Hallam *et al.*

(1999) goes on to state that this ideology often portrays the dead body as a “source of disease and contamination” (125) and other associated connotations which Schwass (2005) attributes to the “steady medicalisation of death” (14). The urgency for the need to contain the body (through embalming for example) and the highly controlled atmosphere surrounding access to the body in medical institutions and funeral homes could be understood as a response to this deeply engrained ideology of the dead body as unfamiliar and abject.

Stephen Deed’s (2004) research titled *Unearthly Landscapes* examines in great detail Māori and Pakeha responses and attitudes towards death and the body by focusing on cemeteries/urupā throughout Aotearoa. He examines traditional urupā, the effect of colonialism on traditional tikanga and the contemporary funeral practices of Pakeha and Māori. His findings were very interesting and of particular relevance to this research. He adds to the literature of social attitudes towards death by noting the disparity between attitudes and behaviour associated with death and the cemetery/urupā. Deed refers to a statement made by geographer Eric Pawson (1991):

Pakeha... prefer to forget death, unless there is a social message to impart. The prominent sitting of Māori cemeteries, and the care lavished upon them...is the antithesis of the European way (142).

He traces the historical origins of both cultures and states that ancient religious and spiritual approaches still continued to influence the way people act towards death today. Deed (2004) states that a European/western death usually meant a small intimate and immediate gathering from the family, where as for Māori the extended family and wider hapu was involved with the entire tangihanga event because Māori culture is based on a wide kinship system and a death within an iwi is of great concern and interest to every member of his or her tribe. He goes onto say that this trend stems from a complex system where death and the actual deceased body plays an important visual role in contemporary Māori society. The way the body is

prepared and left visible for the family to see and sleep next to leading up to the actual burial is an example of the way in which the spaces and boundaries that appear to define life and death are openly transgressed during tangihanga.

While the above quote from Pawson highlights the importance of the practice of tikanga in both traditional and contemporary tangi practices, this, like my own commentary, falls into the trap of repositioning Māori approaches to death and the body in a favourable light while somehow suggesting that pakeha/western approaches are somehow 'opposite' and therefore insensitive. It is this issue that makes talking about death, especially cross-culturally, particularly troublesome and complicated. I acknowledge the complexity of research into this area and remain quite aware of the multifarious issues it entails. It is this mix of cultural beliefs, dominant discourses and personal perspectives that complicates discussions of death. When discussing cross cultural perspectives or approaches to death, there is danger in talking about culture as separate and distinct categories. My intention is not, in any way, to compare Māori and Western approaches to death. Such an objective would ignore the influence of colonialism and the widespread incorporation on Christian principles within Māori culture (and vice versa) as well as the personal and emotional toll death has across cultures. Rather, the focus is on better understanding the way meta-narratives, such as the institutionalization of death, have been traditionally positioned as the dominant discourse and the subsequent effect of these discourses in creating confusion within multi cultural societies over the protection of wāhi tapu and what to do when ancestral bones are unearthed.

### **Emotional Geography and the Embodied Experience**

Emotions are a central part of human reality. Emotions affect how we internalize, interpret and understand the world around us which shapes the perspectives and worldviews that we hold (Thien 2005). It seems odd then

that emotions have been kept at the periphery of academic enquiry for so long. In response to this, geographers such as Deborah Thien (2005), Katy Bennett (2004) and others have begun to ask the unasked questions concerning the role of emotion in our everyday lives and in doing so have pushed for emotions to be taken seriously. It is from their combined work that has prompted the establishment of emotional geography as part of a move towards additional contemporary sub-disciplines of geography. Thien (2005) provides a useful definition:

Emotional geographies encompasses a growing interdisciplinary scholarship that combines the insights of geography, gender studies, cultural studies, sociology, anthropology and other disciplines to understand how the world is mediated by feeling. Collectively, this still nascent work carries forward poststructuralist challenges to a strictly rational and masculinist social science by addressing the spatialities of emotions (1).

This is an exciting new territory for geographers. Contributors to *Emotional Geographies* (2005) advocate that there are many aspects of the human experience where emotions play an important part. A shared objective of these authors is to legitimise emotions as a worthwhile and important area of scholarship and to highlight the potential wealth of information that emotional enquiry can produce.

Discussions of death may seem an unusual area of interest for geographers however as contemporary geographers such as Liz Bondi (2005), Sara Morris and Carol Thomas (2005) and Brenda Yeoh (1999) suggest, human reaction to emotional situations such as grief and death are moving towards the frontline of geographical debate. Emotional geography is also a sub discipline that works well with other critical perspectives, especially where the 'body' is concerned. It offers alternative and often overlooked aspects of social communication and interaction that influence, disrupt and complicate human relationships on a daily basis. For these reasons academics are starting to team emotions with feminism and post-structuralism in order to challenge



dominant western frameworks. Caron Lipman (2006) suggests that traditionally “geographers have sidelined emotions because they are too difficult to deal with” (618), however this avoidance only works to strengthen dominant ‘masculinist’ ways of thinking by appropriating traditional binary categories whereby emotions (feminine) are demoted and set in contrast against rationality (masculine) (Cloke & Johnston 2005). Lipman (2006) adds, “the self contained Western identity has to be constructed, and this, depends on projecting outside of ourselves unwanted affects such as anxiety and depression” (619). Lipman (2006) and other geographers seek to challenge this deeply ingrained misconception that these ‘unwanted affects’ can complicate academic scholarship and threaten researchers’ position as a qualified, ‘objective’ academics.

Emotional geography is relevant to this research as the central inquiry looks into exactly that, emotion. It deals with emotion on various levels, for example not only does this research deal with the difficult realities such as natural disasters, death and the discovery of ancestral bones but it also deals with the more intimate and personal issue of people’s emotional responses concerning spirituality and conceptions of sacredness. I include ideas of emotional geography to help work through some of the complex issues in the analysis stages as well as incorporating these insights in my methodology section (see chapter 3).

Like many geographers (Cook 2005, England 1994 & Hay 2000) I advocate strongly for critical reflexivity and I also support the inclusion of emotional commentary from the researcher *throughout* the research as opposed to limiting these discussions to the methodology chapter. It allows for the situated and emotional role of the researcher to be explored, their feelings and experiences expressed which highlights the importance of emotions in everyday situations as well as bringing to attention the embodied nature of conducting research. This works to destabilize the traditional western ‘distancing’ of one’s self from the research (Cook 2005) and I feel that it can

compliment kaupapa Māori research and the concept of whakawhānaungatanga (Bishop 1996).

This research deals with a number of highly emotional issues from the cultural significance of wāhi tapu, desecration of sacred sites, privileging of western knowledge and people's personal responses to the actual flood event, therefore the incorporation of emotional geography is highly relevant as it "offers a promising avenue through which to advance understandings of dynamic geographies of difference, exclusion and oppression" (Lipman 2006 619). Studying emotion brings into sharp relief the way emotion has been traditionally sidelined from academic enquiry through the influence of binary thinking. Bringing the underlying components of dichotomous discourses into the spotlight can provide a better understanding of why rational and disembodied systems of thought have been, and continue, to influence institutional response to sacred spaces (Davidson, Bondi & Smith 2005).

Along with emotions, the embodied experience has also been a current topic amongst geographers. Geographers such as Robyn Longhurst (1997), Pamela Moss and Isabel Dyck (2003) remind us that the body is the first place we experience the world around us. Davidson and Milligan (2004) add that

...our first and foremost, most immediate and intimately *felt* geography is the body, the site of emotional experience and expression *par excellence*. Emotions, to be sure, *take place* within and around the closest of spatial spaces (1).

To talk about sacred space and place void of emotion and the embodied experience as if they exist as abstract, tangible spaces would be virtually impossible given that it is through emotion and sensory experience that we are able to process and conceptualize different elements of the world around us. Within Māori culture, the body is bound within a complex structure stemming from traditional understandings between the natural and spiritual

world (Shirres 1997). It is in these instances that including the notion of embodiment becomes useful.

This chapter has been dedicated to locating the sacred within geography. Given the role of spirituality and belief systems that are often associated with sacredness, exploring sacred space and place seems a particularly fitting topic for geographers but yet it continues to be an area that has received little attention. I have positioned this research within the realms of cultural and emotional geography. Coupled together, these frameworks allow for critical discussions about the impact that 'sacredness' can have on moulding peoples lives and shaping particular worldviews. This type of framework also permits for reflexive and personal commentary while enabling me to create an approach that compliments the research content. In this case it means integrating a unique and culturally appropriate methodology known as kaupapa Māori. The following chapter charts the process of conducting kaupapa māori and some of the unique components that are involved.

## **Chapter three**

### **Methodology**

An appropriate methodological framework is crucial to the overall success of research. Justifying the reasons for selecting particular methods and stating why they compliment the chosen theories is important as it provides an important foundation in which to apply empirical findings (Martin and Flowerdew 2005). Throughout the entire research process I was confronted with a matrix of complicated matters concerning the implementation of my chosen methods. This has been of particular value and has added to the overall experience of the research as I continue to work through these methodological dilemmas.

The purpose of this chapter, then, is to outline the methodological framework used for this research. I begin by situating my research within a particular approach to doing research known as kaupapa Māori. Careful thought has gone into the construction of a framework that is both sensitive to the highly delicate nature of the topic while still aiming to gather in-depth qualitative information. A kaupapa Māori approach to research is framed within the wider discourse of Māori knowledges so the dynamics of conducting research is somewhat different to traditional qualitative research methods (Tuhiwai-Smith 1999). Second, I feel that it is important to discuss my positionality at the onset of this chapter. It is a highly influential issue for Māori researchers since it often underpins the motivation for conducting kaupapa Māori research and, as I will explain, has particular bearing on the way I approach the research in terms of the relationships with participants and community members of my case study location.

There are particular issues to consider when conducting research from a kaupapa Māori perspective involving Māori communities such as the interests of the community, ensuring that the methods of data collection are consistent

with a Māori way of doing things and accountability to whānau. For these reasons Māori commentators (Tuhiwai-Smith 1999, Bishop 1996 and Wihongi 2002) advocate for the incorporation of a research whānau to help guide and advise the research. Thirdly I discuss the importance of establishing a research whānau and how it can be beneficial for both the researcher and the participant/community, particularly research like mine which involves culturally significant information. I then move on to the actual data collection process by including an in-depth discussion about how I applied principles of a kaupapa Māori approach to the information gathering stages (initiating interest in the research, contacting participants, working with kaumatua etc). Finally I note the complexity of issues that can arise when western perspectives of constructing research contradict and complicate the process for researchers, who like myself, are attuned to both Māori and western approaches, especially concerning public access to knowledge.

### **Doing Kaupapa Māori research**

Academics working from within both western and Māori frameworks of thought commonly find themselves at crossroads when faced with the prospect of conducting research that brings together these two very different perspectives (Gibbs 2001). For this research, understanding the principals of tikanga and Māori knowledge is important to the entire framework. It underpins a particular methodological approach as well as offers insight into the way sacred sites and places are allocated specific protocols regarding access to knowledge. For these reasons it is crucial that the fundamental aspects that shape Māori worldview of knowledges are visited.

Traditional accounts of the acquirement of knowledge stem from the ancestral being of Tane. Mythology tells of his travels through the heavens to the twelfth heaven where he collected three baskets of knowledge. His brave feat is remembered by an approach that acknowledges the power and sacredness of knowledge and the heroic actions of Tane in his efforts to bring knowledge to the human world (Tolich & Davidson 1999). In order to retain the

significance of this occasion, certain protocol and custom was afforded to the acquisition and dissemination of certain types of knowledge. Traditionally, knowledge was “highly prized and tightly regulated” (Te Awekotuku 1991 7) and carefully guarded by specifically appointed members of the iwi such as kaumatua and tohunga. Certain categories of knowledge were kept within a tight community and to be included within this community brought great honour as well as great responsibility (Te Awekotuku 1991).

In contemporary society, many of these ancient suspicions about the highly tapu status of traditional knowledge remain and is an issue that has been complicated by the negative impact of research into Māori communities by researchers conditioned to a western eurocentric viewpoint (Tuhiwai-Smith 1998). Amongst these effects is the assumption that knowledge is predominately public and so information that was gathered on Māori communities was often dispersed amongst the public arena. This can become a problem when researchers include information considered intellectual property of that particular iwi or hapu (Te Awekotuku 1991). For these reasons, academics such as Linda Tuhiwai Smith (1998) and Russell Bishop (1999) encourage the incorporation of a methodological approach that is congruent with Māori worldviews and perspectives.

As prominent scholar Ngahuia Te Awekotuku (1991) instills, research undertaken by Māori on Māori issues should be guided by principals of kaupapa Māori to maintain legitimacy and accountability on behalf of the researcher and to ensure that the methods and theoretical frameworks utilized are culturally appropriate as viewed by participants. This research focuses on a uniquely Māori issue. It is therefore important that this research is situated within a framework that adopts ideas, concepts and methods which correspond with Māori belief systems. Like many contemporary Māori academics, I am guided by a kaupapa Māori paradigm. Kaupapa Māori is based on an “indigenous approach to research” (Bishop 1999 2) meaning that it is an epistemological stance that distances itself from traditional western

models and determines its own agenda based on values, belief systems and actions accorded by Māori tradition. The discourse of Kaupapa Māori emerged as an alternative research paradigm out of the dissatisfaction with 'orthodox' western methods which have in the past gained the infamous reputation amongst Māori communities for being incompatible and in many cases ethically inconsistent with a Māori understanding of the world (Bishop 1998).

Various Māori commentators have offered general definitions of Kaupapa Māori which basically follow the same premise. I particularly like Fiona Cram's (2001) version as it ties together a number of issues relevant to this research in relation to valuing Māori knowledge. She believes that "Kaupapa Māori is an attempt to retrieve space for Māori voices and perspectives ... it also opens up avenues for approaching and critiquing dominant, Western worldviews" (40). In addition it is a theory that can be used to examine "existing power structures and societal inequalities" that dominant groups use to construct exclusive hegemonic ideologies (Cram 2001 40).

However, it is important to remember that Kaupapa Māori as a research paradigm has emerged from within western institutional settings by Māori academics, therefore it still carries the underpinnings of the dominant western ideas about how to conduct research, except they are framed in a more culturally compatible way. This presents a number of issues for researchers such as myself. Because of my limited skill in te reo and the fact that I have been immersed within an academic environment for the past five years meant that it was difficult to detach myself from my 'westernized' training as a researcher. Geographer Wikitoria August (2005) shares similar anxieties within her research; we could be seen as adopting almost a paradoxical position in that we both explore uniquely Māori topics, applying methods of kaupapa Māori with community members who view the world through the lens of matauranga Māori, however, we may appear as 'outsiders' in the sense that we are limited in our ability to speak fluently. I also have the added

disadvantage of being relatively disconnected with my Māori heritage up until this research experience. As will be made clearer in further sections, I embraced this opportunity to learn more about my own tribal history and my affiliation to Matata and have made it a point to include this personal journey within the research.

### ***Access to Māori knowledge***

The discovery of wāhi tapu and koiwi presents a number of dilemmas in regard to public knowledge. This may be apparent in planning disputes over mapping, locating and publicly documenting details of these sacred sites. While institutions such as local authorities may insist that mapping sacred sites can act as a protection mechanism, since the public will know where these sites are located, this issue is much more complex. Much of the apprehension being felt by Māori communities is based on tapu and secrecy placed on particular areas which have been passed on through generations and the fact that there have been numerous incidences, both past and recent, of disrespect and intrusion after the location has been made public knowledge (Te Awekotuku 1991). Reasons for interest in these sacred areas are varied; it may be for academic reasons (research), development (council work) or simply intrigue from the public. It is interesting to note how these stories can become so instilled within the community whānau that they act as an informal deterrent or protection measure for certain areas. Te Awekotuku (1991) states:

There are pragmatic reasons for this in that publication of the location of old burial ground can be construed as an inundation to artefact hunters who will desecrate the wāhi tapu. There are also strong spiritual reasons, in that the significance of such places is something that is part of the heritage of the tribe or hapu, and belongs to that group, not the public generally (8).

In light of these discussions, this research then could be seen as rather contradictory. By this I mean that it is concerned with two very tapu topics,



sacred sites and the emotional discovery of ancestral bones, hence talking about them can be problematic and defiantly not as straightforward as simply undertaking 'traditional' fieldwork. Undoubtedly this has created a moral matrix for me as I come face to face with these complex issues. It is in circumstances such as these that working from a combined framework of cultural and emotional geographies are particularly useful as they both encourage reflexive commentary for the researcher (Cook 2005 and Thien 2005). This research has meant confronting a number of important but difficult questions such as: should I be undertaking this research at all, given the sensitivity of the topic? Should I undertake this research? How will the community respond to me? It was this raft of ethical, personal and cultural questions that I grappled with (and continue to). For these reasons I sought support from the community at the outset of research (Tolich & Davidson 1999). In order to help work through these issues, it is essential that my own position within the research is visited.

### **My Positionality**

Situating the position of the researcher within the research is common for contemporary cultural geographers. This move to include one's self within the research arose out of the realization that 'objective' and distancing, a common trademark of past and much present social science research, left out a major component, the highly influential social position of the researcher (Bondi, Davidson and Smith 2005). Tuhiwai-Smith (1999) maintains that where Māori research is concerned it is crucial that the whakapapa lineage is made transparent throughout the research process. Like Bondi, Davidson and Smith (2005) I add to these assertions by stating that the emotional role of the researcher is also another important dimension to consider and include. Given the highly emotive issues being discussed, I feel that it is important to include my own responses, apprehensions and experiences throughout the research process as I believe that this will add to the overall importance and significance and originality of researching wāhi tapu.

As already highlighted, Matata is the converging location of Tuwharetoa, Ngati Rangitahi and Ngati Awa and their respective hapu. It is an area of rich historical significance where occupying iwi all hold claim to the land. Each iwi traces their occupancy of the rohe to events and movements from their tipuna. Members from these iwi remain actively involved as kaitiaki of their lands. While they all share the common goal of preserving and maintaining sites of significance, each exercise their rights over the land which, at times, has led to tribal conflict and inter Māori politics. I found myself instantly included within this web of iwi politics through my affiliations to Matata through iwi, Ngati Awa and hapu, Nga Maihi. This raised issues of perspective, that is, how being Ngati Awa would affect my position as a researcher given the complicated relations between Ngati Awa and other iwi of the area. Being aware that participants outside of Ngati Awa may fairly assume that I would approach this issue from a Ngati Awa perspective, my objective was, and is, to be transparent in my reasons for pursuing this topic and that while I am somewhat conditioned to a Ngati Awa account of historical events, my intentions were to talk to Māori of Matata from various iwi in order to emphasise the shared concern and emotional toll of the discovery of koiwi as a collective whānau of Matata. This did mean, however, that I had to remain aware of the tribal variation when it came to recalling historical information and particular names and explanations of wāhi tapu. For these reasons I have emphasized certain tribal accounts of certain events where needed.

It was important that I remained aware of my situated position in that I was not detached from the participants and as outlined in my reasons for wanting to continue this line of study (see page 13) I have developed a strong connection to the place and people of Matata as a result of current and past research. As stated in earlier research “I acknowledge that I am documenting this research through a web of my own subjective interpretation both looking in (as a researcher who has been trained in a western institutional University) and looking out (as a member of Ngati Awa)” (Brown 2006 13). This again,

reiterates the point made earlier that I occupy a rather paradoxical position and that the experience of being situated in these hybrid positions effects every facet of this thesis, from the creation of research objectives, to the way the information is presented. Feminist Robina Mohammad (2001) discusses the notion of the 'insider' / 'outsider' boundary, she states:

'insider' / 'outsider' refers to the boundary marking an inside from an outside, a boundary that is seen to circumscribe identity, social position and belonging and as such marks those who do not belong and hence excluded (101).

I am situated in the 'inbetweenness' of this insider / outsider binary and therefore it was crucial that I be guided through the process of my research by appropriate community members and academic scholars. Faced with this raft of uncomfortable feelings<sup>6</sup> concerning my position, whether I should continue this research topic and whether I should carry on at all, were just a few of the perplexing questions that I was faced with at the outset of the project. It was reassuring to read commentary from geographers about the significant effect of the researcher's own positionality (such as gender, ethnic background, age etc) throughout all stages of the research. However, Rebekah Widdowfield (2000) presents an additional valid point,

While there is general acknowledgment that the researcher affects the research process, there is less appreciation (or certainly in academic writings) that there is often a two-way relationship - not only does the researcher affect the research process but they are themselves *affected* by this process (200).

My interaction with community members and kaumatua, as well as experiencing the actual physical and spiritual dimensions of Matata, affected me from the very conception of the research. I had similar experiences with

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<sup>6</sup> Excerpt from my research diary (20 April 2007): I am beginning to wonder if I am the 'right' person to be doing this research. While I haven't figured out what exactly qualifies as the 'right person', the cultural importance of waahi tapu and my own 'welling up' of spiritual connection to these sacred spaces is a strange and somewhat daunting task, which suggests to me that I should continue on"

this community during my previous research, however the process of learning more about the history and the spiritual ties to the land and sacred spaces was a uniquely personal experience between me and the people I spoke with. Having a well respected kaumatua of Matata (who I was also related to through shared whakapapa) trace my ancestry to Matata by showing me my family tree was a memorable experience, an experience unique to being Māori and doing research within a community who includes the researchers own iwi. The realization of shared history, shared tūpuna, which inevitably meant shared connection to the ancestral bones that had been unearthed, forged an intimate relationship between me and the people, space and place of Matata. To *not* engage with my own experience would be, in my opinion, impossible. I include these experiences within the research as I believe it adds to the originality and particular nature of this research.

### **My Research Whānau**

Given the complexity of issues concerning my positionality outlined above, I contacted a person who had been involved with previous research both as a research Participant and informal supervisor at the very early planning stages of this thesis. I wanted to present my research intentions and apprehensions to this person because he would be able to give me direct advice and personal opinions. In addition to this korero I also presented my research to another former research participant. After an in-depth discussion about the content of the research, it was decided that it would be a good idea to establish some sort of peer support/whānau group (see Wihongi 2002). The purpose of a research whānau is to have a support system in place to gain advice, tikanga, mentorship and guidance during the research process. Some of my whānau group were also research Participants.

Like most Māori academics, such as Tuhiwai-Smith (1999) and Bishop (1999), I also highly support the establishment and incorporation of a whānau group or some sort of peer support system for Māori researchers. It coincides with a kaupapa Māori understanding of whakawhānaungatanga and

producing research that is beneficial for the research Participants and community. In her book *Decolonizing Methodologies, Research and Indigenous Peoples* (1999) Linda Tuhiwai Smith discusses the need to have a 'research based support systems' in place as part of being an 'insider' researcher (137). She believes that part of being an insider is to remain reflexive and aware of one's position within the research throughout the entire process and having this support system is crucial to this goal. This is an idea that is also advocated by many geographers, especially critical and feminist geographers such as England (1997) and McKay (2002). The following section outlines the main advantages of incorporating this method into the methodology.

I asked former research participants if I could discuss my objectives and intentions of my research and for them to give me feedback. Because all members had an intimate interest and investment in Matata, this activity was useful in gauging their opinions and perspectives at the early development stages of the research. Given the sensitivity of the topic, this group acted as a 'pilot group' in which I could openly discuss my intentions (and research methods). This process can be beneficial for potential participants by ensuring that the type of questions and approach to the topic is constructed in a culturally sensitive manner to avoid awkward circumstances for both the Participants and myself. I entered this phase being flexible and open to change. These discussions were of particular importance to the success of my methodological approach. It highlights a fundamental difference between the traditional Western methodological protocol and Kaupapa Māori research as the latter welcomes the opportunity for outside commentary and is commonly scrutinized from a community of support, as opposed to supposedly being under the sole control of the researcher and their appointed supervisor. However, this move for increased participant involvement beyond the actual data collection phase is becoming a popular technique amongst contemporary geographers (Pain & Francis 2003).

Like most research methodologies, this research is not free from obstacles. Contacting and staying in contact with whānau members can be difficult due to location, time restraints and arranging personal schedules. While I experienced these difficulties, I looked for alternatives which meant extending this original whānau group to include family, friends and past research participants. Working closely with my research whānau meant that I had a number of trusted people that I could turn to who were genuinely interested in the research. It was my objective to share with these people problems or issues I faced. I felt that this also demonstrated that I continue to thoroughly think through the complexity of the topic and appreciated the high sensitivity of this type of research.

It was reassuring to present the research outline to people I trusted and to receive constructive feedback concerning the material. For instance, this type of 'pilot test' can reveal areas of an interview schedule that could be worded more appropriately or in a more sensitive way or perhaps the proposed questions may not be as relevant to the topic as first thought. Having this level of guidance was invaluable because they were able to look at my work from a subjective position (being community members of Matata and sharing similar circumstances to potential participants) as well as critiquing it from collective academic and Māori perspectives. This exercise was useful as their participation allowed for a situation where I felt comfortable enough to ask for advice (about particular tikanga for example) and guidance.

There are also advantages of establishing a research whānau for the Participants. It can demonstrate a conscious attempt and commitment on behalf of the researcher to create a framework that is culturally and emotionally sensitive. It also helps to destabilize the Eurocentric assumption of the dominant role of the researcher by openly seeking advice and guidance where needed (Tuhiwai Smith 1999). It can also reassure Participants that the research has been scrutinized and approved by people (including kaumatua) of their own community and that they have people they can

contact if they are worried about the certain aspects of research as opposed to traditional institutional methods that usually only provide the researcher and supervisor as primary contacts.

Sharing similar objectives to a whānau group is Participatory Action Research (PAR) and is becoming a popular method for social and cultural geographers. Rachel Pain and Peter Francis (2003) acknowledge the value in the incorporation of a more participant-driven/orientated research for similar reasons as encouraged by kaupapa Māori researchers. It can be split into various categories in which many of the objectives overlap but the angle of approach and methods utilized differ. Pain and Francis (2003) purposely differentiate between participatory research and action research stating that the former is primarily focused on a shift in dynamics as opposed to traditional forms of participant involvement. 'Participating' in the research usually means working along side the research team to develop, contribute and determine a project that directly targets issues identified as important from both the researcher and researched (Pain 2003). Action research is commonly combined with activism stemming from a political agenda.

While it may seem rather unusual to include the notion of participatory action research when I have explicitly stated this research is based upon a kaupapa Māori paradigm, I believe it is important to note the advances in contemporary geography in establishing and encouraging research that is participant orientated as both paradigms advocate the importance of reflective participation on the part of the researcher. Analysing both PAR and the incorporation of a research whānau can be complimentary as it demonstrates the usefulness of merging different frameworks of thought (cultural geography and tikanga Māori) together to create an alternative means of inquiry into the discovery of ancestral bones in Aotearoa. It also is an example of the hybridity of knowledges and worldviews within multicultural societies.

### ***Finding and meeting with Participants***

My approach to establishing contacts was relatively flexible. From the onset of the project, I acknowledged that it may be difficult to attract interest in participating because it would involve openly discussing information and experiences about an issue that was commonly a highly guarded topic and that could also involve talking about the 2005 flood. As indicated by former research participants, the flood was a traumatic experience and is still a raw issue in that the community is still working through difficult issues of cleaning up and working towards protecting the town for future floods (Brown 2006). Because residents were still coming to terms with the destruction caused by the flood, I had to consider the effect of my research on potential participants as I did not want to impose at an already difficult time. Again I turned to people from my previous research and asked about how best to approach it. While I was met with a positive response, I was told that I might encounter a certain degree of apprehension towards the research. After further discussion with one former research participant, it became clear that this apprehension may be felt on two levels. On one level people may feel apprehensive about openly talking about such a sacred topic and that, “they might not even want to go into that headspace” (participant three). As indicated by another participant, I should expect hesitation with regard to my role as a researcher, and that while they did not mind talking about wāhi tapu, others might (participant five). By ‘hesitation’, I mean reluctance to share sensitive iwi and historical information with someone who was largely unknown to them. They may be suspicious about the motivations and intentions of my research.

For these reasons I decided to ask members in my whānau group and people of Matata that I had already established a rapport with, to forward additional contacts that they thought may be useful and who may be interested in participating. Known as the ‘snowballing’ technique (Hay 2000) this proved to be a useful method. It also meant that the research and me as a researcher had already been semi-introduced to potential participants by people who knew me and had an understanding of the research direction and objectives.



Once initial phone contact was made, we arranged times and dates which were usually at their home or at a convenient location for them whereby introductions and the objectives of my research were explained (for a copy of my letter of introduction, information sheet and consent form see appendix one and two and three). I offered a copy of my previous research for them to read while they considered participating (see Brown 2006). I hoped that this would demonstrate my sincerity and dedication to the issues concerning wāhi tapu at Matata.

I visited Matata nine times during the course of my research, from May to August. I wanted to fit in with the participants' personal schedules so many of the trips were made at short notice. Once I had arranged a time to meet, I often contacted other participants to let them know that I would be in Matata and whether it suited them to also meet up. I met with six people, three that had been involved in my previous research and three other contacts that were suggested to me by this group or by family and friends.

The actual data collection process was made up of a number of techniques. The main pool of data came from conversations both formally (arranged interviews) and informally (unscheduled meetings), as well as from analysing the collection of newspaper articles stored at the Whakatane Museum. It was my objective to remain flexible during the data collection phase in terms of last minute meetings with people and the possibility of meeting participants in places that may not be 'ideal' interviewing locations (e.g. noisy or public places). It also meant that I had to remain prepared for 'out of the blue' opportunities to speak with people.<sup>7</sup>

An ethical dilemma I faced at the onset of this research was whether I would audio tape record interviews or conversations with participants. Because of the possibility that participants may share sensitive information with me, I felt

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<sup>7</sup> See appendix 4 for initial interview schedule

uncomfortable with the idea of audio tape recording. However I realised that I would only have the space of the actual interview to carefully listen and capture the opinions and perspectives of the participants so I took along a tape recorder but judged whether it was appropriate to use it or not in each situation. As Gill Valentine (2005) states, it is important for researchers to think about the people they may be interviewing as well as the content of the interviews (e.g. sensitive or personal information, or perhaps politically controversial opinions). Researchers in this position often have to work with the ethics committee to come to an arrangement that allows more appropriate alternatives while still meeting the rigours of institutional ethical regulations. Because most of my meetings were either last minute or quick conversations (over the phone, for example), I took a notepad to jot down important names, such as names of places, hapu and wāhi tapu, but my objective was to listen and engage with the participants as much as possible. Immediately after these meetings, I set aside time to recalling our conversations and commenting on their body language, gestures, emotional responses and so on in my research diary. I did audio tape record one interview which ran for approximately one hour. In this circumstance, the participant asked me if I was going to audio tape record and indicated that he was okay with me doing so.

### **Working with silences: the data collection process**

During the early planning stage of this research I was faced with a major dilemma. How was I going to collect data on a highly sensitive topic which includes historical information that is stored within the members of the community? There are many dimensions to silenced information within Māori society, most stem from a complex recognition of the highly tapu nature of information concerning wāhi tapu (Manatu Māori 1992). It is common for people to be reserved about sharing spiritual and historical information for a number of reasons, be it for personal spiritual protection or out of the security and well-being of their hapu. While I understood the seriousness of this issue, admittedly I did become concerned about how to develop an enquiry that was

intended to highlight the significance of sacred sites to Māori without knowing if I would have any kind of access to relevant information. However, after talking this matter through to great lengths with some of my established contacts, I realized that this was not an obstacle, but rather a research finding within itself. That is, the ‘silences’ concerning these highly sacred issues are testament to the importance of this information to Māori. The fact that Māori may be reserved in sharing this type of detail is a reflection of the deep attachment and meaning attributed to these sites, and hence the suspicion about the motives of research that may be concerned with wāhi tapu. I realized that even if I was met with an unwillingness or hesitation to talk about sacred sites and kōiwi, finding out the reasons and listening to these intended silences would be beneficial and in fact a research finding within itself.

It seems that my experience with silences is not unique; geographer Yvonne Underhill-Sem appears to have shared similar circumstances in her research in terms of selecting a highly emotional topic and finding herself immersed within a ‘silenced’ community. She too expresses an initial discomfort with this situation but with deeper analysis begins to deconstruct this perceived research barrier as an actual research finding. In fact she dedicates an unintended chapter to this issue in an attempt to work through the covert meanings, implications, power relations and consequences of these silences and insists that a lot can be heard from listening to these silent voices. To provide some background, Underhill-Sem (2000) investigated the “experience of pregnant women of Wanigela in Papua New Guinea” (227). In some instances Underhill-Sem’s work echoes similarities in her findings regarding the spiritual reasons for the reluctance of women to talk openly about their experiences of childbirth. They too were caught up in a wider system of spiritual acknowledgment concerning birth and life and the dangers of disrespect of these powers (2000). The second part of the following excerpt reflects similar feelings of my own about the value of sacred knowledge:

it is not just the fear of sorcery that encourages silences about pregnancy and childbearing bodies. Rather, I argue it is because *the greatest respect that can be given to anything is to relegate it to silence but not from memory* (235).

The issue of silenced information also can overflow into debates over contemporary research methods. From a naïve or inexperienced perspective, reluctance to share or participate in discussions could simply be read as uncooperativeness or disinterest on behalf of the Participants; these types of situations can actually be deconstructed and deeper layers exposed. These seemingly uneventful encounters can produce a wealth of information suggesting the value of deeper reflection into these sorts of situations. It also contributes to a wider critique of existing dominant research methods and the power attributed to the spoken and written word. Underhill -Sem (2000) suggests that “unlike those absences that are often denied or rendered insignificant in modernist scientific analysis, silences can be examined” (249). In order to examine these silences entails going beyond the superficial and obvious available data; to venture outside of a Eurocentric assumption about knowledge barriers. It is important to remember that “spoken language is only one medium through which life is learned...” (249). However this is not always an easy task, it involves a conceptual shift, from thinking of “anchored narratives” to a more “fluid” (249) approach. I reiterate the point I made earlier that the fact that people may seem reserved about sharing information concerning sacred sites and spaces is testament to the influence of sacredness to their sense of identity and attachment to the land. The fact that local Māori are sometimes nervous about recalling historical details reflects the respect and meaningful relationship to these spaces.

Silences are complicated and multifaceted. Encountering silences within a community can present a researcher with ethical and personal dilemmas with regard to continuation of the project, what these silences mean and if they are interpreting them correctly. For these reasons, it is essential that researchers critically consider their own position within the research, the power laden

relations that exist within the community as well as between the researcher and participant (and vice versa). This is where having the support of a research whānau becomes invaluable.

### **Including secondary data**

To compliment my primary empirical research findings I also used secondary sources of information. Clarke (2005) defines secondary data as “data that has already been collected by someone else” (57) which is useful in providing “context for the primary data” (59). Because my research deals with historical information (such as the battle of Kaokaoroa) as well as on-going debates about koiwi dating back to the early 1980s, Clark (2005) adds that “the historical dimension is provided when you use the secondary data to create time series extending back from your present day observations” (59). With this in mind I wanted to use archival information to enable me to gain a better understanding of the historical circumstances of Matata. I began with a preliminary search of newspaper articles with the cooperation of the staff at the Whakatane Museum. This was useful for two reasons, firstly I was able to gauge the interest in the discovery of ancestral bones in Matata by the consistent reporting dating back to 1980, and it also helped to identify certain issues of interest that helped establish a general timeline of events as well as inform and define the scope of inquiry. In addition, these newspaper articles provided me with some key people within the greater community who seemed to be actively involved in this issue.

Using secondary data is a popular technique which can compliment empirical research (Clarke 2005). There are various techniques available to the researcher to help sort through this type of data. A popular technique used to critically analyze newspaper articles is discourse analysis. Key components of this method involve concentrating on the “language use beyond the boundaries of a sentence ... interrelationships between language and society and the “interactive or dialogic properties of everyday communication” (Stubbs 1983 1). This meant taking a deconstructive approach and examining

the strategic positioning of the articles, the number of articles published, the underlying discourses and the position of the authors. Clark (2005) states that “how they (the reporters) define and treat ‘news’ is an important topic in itself” (63). They insist that researchers need to be mindful of these aspects of secondary data as they can offer potentially fruitful dimensions that may not have been considered within the original research plan. While discourse analysis was useful in identifying areas that should be included such as the Rangitaiki Drainage Scheme and the effect on the Otaramuturangi urupā (see page 61), this method was primarily used as a preliminary data collection method to support my main empirical research findings.

I found this data to be valuable when talking to research participants because it acted as an instant point of reference. As a result I was able to mention a particular article that we were both familiar with which resulted in an in-depth discussion on that topic. An example of this was in regard to a recent archaeological dig by Auckland university students at Te Kohika (see figure nine). It was central front page news of the *Whakatane Beacon* and used emotive language both by the author to describe the situation as well as quotes of local Māori involved. It was also fairly recent (February 2007) which indicated the topicality as well as the on-going reporting of discoveries of ancestral bones at Matata. Merging my empirical data with secondary data was useful to not only gain a better understanding of the context of certain events but it also enabled me to draw out certain themes. Once I had analysed the raw material from participants I set about trying to order it in a time-line of events as well as highlight quotes that would be interesting to insert within the thesis and that would reflect some of the more personal experiences of local iwi.

This methodology chapter has exposed some important components involved in conducting kaupapa Māori research. My overall objective was to be transparent in my own personal experience in attempt to highlight the delicate

nature of the research topic. I believe that much of the success of kaupapa Māori research lies in the support of the wider whanau community, this was certainly the case for this research. Working along side whanau helped me to work through some of the tricky issues that can arise with sensitive research such as mine. The next chapter explores some of the key concepts of a Māori perspective regarding the body, death and the cultural importance of certain sites and spaces.

## **Chapter four**

### **Sacred spaces of Matata**

To say that a specific space is a sacred place is not simply to describe a piece of land, or just locate it in a certain position in a landscape. What is known as a sacred site comes with it a whole range of rules and regulations regarding people's behavior in relation to it and implies a set of beliefs to do with the non-empirical world, often in relation to spirits of the ancestors, as well as more remote or powerful gods or spirits (Carmichael 1994 3).

The English term 'sacred' often conjures up thoughts of an 'out of the ordinary' or 'special' space or area, a place imbued with particular meaning. This meaning commonly has spiritual or religious underpinnings (Hubert 1994). Within Aotearoa the notion of 'sacred' is central. For Māori, sacred sites have particular cultural worth and deep spiritual meaning. It is a fundamental aspect of identity and reaffirms tribal occupation to particular regions of Aotearoa. Māori culture, like many indigenous cultures, perceives the natural and human environs as interconnected and inseparable systems which are experienced through embodied incorporation of traditional tikanga and custom.

I, like many, have trouble in attempting to encapsulate or convey the complex significance of wāhi tapu. Many academics such as August (2004) and Hubert (1994) have pondered this issue and may share my discomfort with simply stating that wāhi tapu means 'sacred site' as it lacks to convey the deep spiritual connection of wāhi tapu to Māori. Wāhi tapu is often referred to as 'windows of the past' in attempt to emphasize the importance of the past in the present Māori world (Manatu Māori 1992 1). Commonly translated to 'sites of significance' wāhi tapu are valued for their "traditional, spiritual, religious or mythological" associations (Te Puni Kōkiri 1996 7). Within Matata there are a number of spaces, areas and things that are recognized as wāhi tapu, most of these hold particular historical and traditional importance to Māori within particular rohe but respect and reverence afforded to these



areas are commonly shared by all Māori. Wāhi tapu may include “sites associated with death” (urupā, ana tūpāpaku, battlegrounds), “sites associated with ritual, ceremonial worship or healing practices” (rivers, lakes, landing sites of waka, mountains) or places “imbued with the mana of chiefs or tūpuna” (Te Puni Kōkiri 1996 7). There are many wāhi tapu located within Matata where the significance in terms of spiritual wellbeing and identity are shared by the different surrounding iwi. Underpinning this important connection to the land and sacred spaces is an approach to death and the body which is distinctively unique. It is important at this stage to explore notions of embodiment and the sacredness of the body from a Māori perspective and how this affects a traditional approach to death which continues to overflow into contemporary Māori society before we visit the situation at Matata. This will contribute to a better understanding about the meanings given to sacred spaces of Matata.

This chapter delves into the notion of ‘sacredness’ within the context of Aotearoa. It includes a journey into the origins of a Māori worldview of sacred sites and spaces in order to demonstrate the premise of the culturally constructed meaning and affiliation afforded to these particular sites and spaces of Matata. The theme of this discussion is firstly to highlight the ways in which death and the body are understood according to tikanga and how this approach informs a particular perspective towards the unearthing and (re) discovery of ancestral bones. Secondly, I connect this to the context of Matata by exploring some sacred spaces of Matata that have been central to the public debate over human bones. I identify three significant events that have contributed and continue to contribute to these debates, the Rangitaiki Drainage Scheme, the residential subdivisions (1980 and 2003) and the 2005 flood. I team my primary data with analyses of local newspaper articles to expose the reactions, opinions and emotions of local iwi members.

## **Sacred body**

“Death, dying and grieving are among the most sacred and important events in Māori life” (Balk 2006 89).

The constant acknowledgment and incorporation of tipuna in everyday life is indicative of the interconnected realms of life and death in Māori society. Great care and respect is afforded to practicing correct tikanga at particular ceremonies such as tangihanga. This caution is also extended to other areas concerning death such as burial, entering urupā, burial caves and other informal burial sites (Mead 2004). Certain protocol such as the sprinkling of water over the head as a means of purification is instilled to ensure that the level of tapu is returned to a neutral state after being amidst these highly tapu areas. Restrictions also extend to other situations, for example, women who are experiencing menstruation are advised to exercise appropriate tikanga concerning wāhi tapu (August 2004).

Situations where death or remains are present may invoke emotions. A distinguishing factor of a Māori approach to death is the collective and encouraged display of emotion that is shared between iwi and the greater Māori community (Strongman & Strongman 1996). It is for these reasons that bringing emotions to the centre of enquiry is important because it can open up new ways of understanding Māori perspectives in relation to ancestral bones. Approaching aspects of human experience through the medium of emotions, in this way, is becoming a popular trend for contemporary geographers particularly in areas of research that traditionally have been subject to institutional standard methods of data collection such as healthcare and terminal illnesses. Geographers such as Morris and Thomas (2005) and Collis (2005) offer alternative ways of learning more about the difficult and emotionally turbulent times for patients and their families by engaging in intimate relationships with the participants and presenting their research as unique opportunities to share the patients' emotional journey. In the same way, this thesis endeavours to go beyond the surface level of what is

sometimes deemed as simply Māori protest concerning sacred sites and places to learn more about the historical and traditional undercurrents that inform these cultural worldviews, opinions and perspectives.

In traditional Māori society, the western ideological boundary of life and death was openly transgressed. For example, one of my participants discussed ceremonial practices where it was common in certain areas of Aotearoa that after ceremonial phases were completed (including burial), the body was buried until enough time had passed to allow for the natural process of decay. The bones were then exhumed and scraped and cleaned in preparation for display. This was a highly tapu phase and included the presence of tohunga and kaumatua who continually performed karakia (participant 2). Like most cultural rituals, this ceremony was subject to tribal variation and is only one example of practice. Another participant shared that it was a common tradition to coat these ancestral bones in red ochre before reburial. This traditional practice has been used to aid local iwi and researchers in dating ancient bones. It has also been used as proof of the existence of an actual purposefully designated burial ground (see figure five) (participant two).

Discussion into the underpinnings of a Māori approach to death is important to highlight as it helps to understand why the discovery of human bones is so emotional and of interest to Māori. To extend this discussion further, the sacredness of the body is worth considering as it brings into focus the more personal lived experience of Māori embodiment. Acknowledgment of atua is represented in many ways, from significant ceremonial events such as birth and tangihanga to the more mundane activities of everyday life. Underpinning this complex system of tikanga is the notion of tapu (Mataira 2000). As a broad category tapu can take on a number of meanings making it difficult to define. Dictionaries are likely to state a number of various meanings depending on particular contexts from 'sanctity' and 'spiritual power' to 'restricted' or 'forbidden'. It is in this wide variety of meanings that can sometimes act to confuse the deep spiritual meaning of tapu. Mead (2003)

provides an all-encompassing explanation of the role of tapu within Māori society. He states that “tapu flows through every thing in life. Tapu is everywhere in our world. It is present *in people*, in places, in buildings, in things, words and in all tikanga. Tapu is inseparable from Mana (prestige), from our identity as Māori and from our cultural practices” (2003 23 – my emphasis) and it is the tapu of the body that is of particular relevance in understanding Māori reactions to human bones.

The tapu of the human body is necessary to consider as it will contribute to a better understanding of the sacredness afforded to human bones. The body has received a lot of academic attention from contemporary geographers who have dedicated their time to deconstructing the multitude of socially constructed meanings surrounding the body in an attempt to offer alternative ways of thinking about space, place and the body and its influence on identity, politics, gender and other social categories (Nast & Pile 1998). More recently, geographers (August 2005 and Hutchings 2007) are teaming indigenous perspectives with the body to highlight the variety of experiences based on systems of thought which differ from dominant western discourse. Earlier I mentioned the work of geographer Wikitoria August (see page 17). Her recent work provides a contemporary example of this production of alternative discourse. Titled “*Māori women: Bodies, spaces, sacredness and mana*” (2005) she explores the connection between the tapu of the Māori female body by concentrating on the way they are ‘constituted within particular cultural spaces (2005 1)’. I refer to this work again as I found this research to share similar objectives with mine in that she too attempts to draw attention to a unique worldview which originates from an intricate incorporation of ancient tradition into everyday modern life. As a consequence, the way the Māori body is perceived (particularly the female body given its association with reproduction) is infused with notions of sacredness and afforded particular status which extend to ceremonious events such as birth, pregnancy, and death (Mead 2003).

Anthropologists have been fascinated with the universal events of birth, life and death and the cultural traditions that commonly accompany these phases (Huntington and Metcalf 1991). Within Māori society these three phases are uniquely connected to hapu and iwi identity as well as linked to ancient ancestral lineage. The connection to the land through Papatūānuku is widely acknowledged and represented by maintaining certain tikanga surrounding this connection between the land and the people (Patterson 2000 and Asher and Naulls 1987). During korero with a participant concerning this relationship between land and people, he referred to the battle of Kaokaoroa and his ancestors that fought and died in the battle. He stated that to better understand the affiliation and spiritual connection we only have to look at the kupu Māori surrounding these events (see figure three). He went on to describe how the word for land and placenta are the same (whenua), indicating the unity between birth, the land and the earth mother. It is tradition that the placenta is reunited to the land after birth. The same link is strengthened upon death where the body is committed back to the whenua. This association also extends to the Māori word for tribe (iwi) and the kupu Māori for bones (koiwi), again indicating the eternal connection between all Māori people, both present and past, as offspring of Papatūānuku and Ranginui (participant 2).

<b>Kupu Maori</b>	<b>Kupu Pakeha</b>
Whenua/whenua	land & placenta
Iwi/koiwi	people & human bones

Figure three: Relationship between people and the land  
Source: Keri Brown 2007 (adapted from participant 2).

The following section introduces Matata through a brief history of post European arrivals as well as discussing further the sensitive issues of the discovery of ancestral bones. The on-going experience for local Māori has

indeed been highly emotional therefore it seems appropriate that the role of emotion and attachment to sacred spaces be situated as a primary focus. The experience of local iwi at Matata will be examined through the lens of both emotional and cultural geographies to demonstrate the central role that emotion has on creating and maintaining Māori identity. In later sections, this view will be critically discussed by exploring the influence of binaries in establishing and reinforcing hegemonic western ideologies. I will examine the way in which the latter appears to separate emotion from institutional responses concerning sacredness.

### **Sacred home, sacred bones**

Bones have been regularly discovered for over 25 years in and around the Matata rohe (Melville 2005). After exploring archival sources at the Whakatane Museum, I found numerous articles concerning the discovery of bones at Matata dating back to 1980. As mentioned in the methodology section, the prominent positioning of these articles coupled with the frequency of articles pertaining to the discovery of bones and related matters is in itself indicative of the community interest and acknowledgment in this issue within the greater community (for further discussion see Fairclough 1995 & 1989). From my analysis, it seems that there are three significant events concerning the unearthing of bones that caused and continue to cause apprehension amongst local Māori at Matata. These events are the Rangitaiki Drainage Scheme, the subdivisions of Kaokaoroa and most recently, the Matata flood of 2005.

The intention of the Rangitaiki drainage scheme was to free up wetlands for farmland. It involved major restructuring and diverting of the river systems between Whakatane River and the Tarawera River (Ngati Awa Raupatu Report 2004). Newspaper articles in the *Whakatane Beacon* concerning the effects of the drainage scheme illustrate the concern felt by local Māori over the potential consequences of diverting the Tarawera River. The new course meant that the Tarawera River now flowed out to sea through the sand hills

adjacent to the Otaramuturangi urupā (in which lie the ancestors of Ngati Rangitahi, Te Arawa, Ngati Awa and Tuwharetoa) instead of flowing into Te Awa o te Atua (*Daily Post* 1981).

## NATURE AGAIN THREATENS BURIAL PLACE

For the second time in less than a century the forces of nature are threatening the ancestral burying place of the Ngati-Rangitahi.

The ancient and sacred Maori cemetery of Otara, at Matata, is being washed away by the combined forces of the sea and the Tarawera River.

Bones and skulls are being rudely washed out of their sandy resting place on a headland above the mouth of the Tarawera. Skulls have been found on the beach below.

The tribal elders at Matata are uneasy. Old stories have been tumbling out of the sandy cliffs for several years now - a sea and river cut steadily away at the sacred burial headland.

Last week a howling northerly gale brought tribal uneasiness to a head.

The river cut deep into the cemetery reserve. Tons of soil poured down into the Tarawera, leaving rows of ancient graves scoured on the very brink of disinterment.

A tribal committee meeting of the Ngati-Rangitahi decided to take urgent action to attempt to preserve the resting place of the bones of its ancestors.

The meeting decided to call a united front of all the tribes whose ancestors lie buried at Otara - the Ngati-Rangitahi, the Arawa, the Ngati-Awa and the Tuwharetoa.

**Sinister Ring**  
Noone, Pukeko or Maori, takes kindly to the thought of his ancestors' bones being dug up and scattered around the countryside. For the Rangitahi, in particular, the sudden threat to Otara cemetery has a sinister ring.

Perhaps they are recalling the prophecy of Tuhoto Arihi, feared totema of Tarawera, who is claimed to have forecast the Tarawera eruption back in time.

According to tribal history, old Tuhoto was very much annoyed at the treatment he had received from one of his grandsons two weeks before the eruption. He told the people of Te Wairoa that a great disaster would overtake them and punish them for their misdeeds.

Disaster followed sure enough - on June 10, 1886, Tarawera burst into violent eruption, killing many of the inhabitants of the shores of Lake Tarawera, burying whole villages under many feet of mud and ash.

**Curse Following**  
The grief and horror of the survivors was heightened by the destruction of the burial place of their ancestors. For generations the dead of the tribes of the district had been interred on the summit of the Tarawera Range.

Wahanga Bluff, with its caves, was the particular burial place of the Ngati-Rangitahi. It was blown into fragments, and with it went the bones of generations of tribal forebears.

The survivors left the dreaded Mt Tarawera region. Many of them settled at Matata, which seemed a fairly safe distance away. Now old Tuhoto's curse seems to be following them up again.

Matata was the original home of the Ngati-Awa, but the tribe sided with the Hauhau during the wars of the 1860's and they were driven out and their lands possessed by the pro-Government Arawas after long and bitter skirmishing in the Rangitahi swamp.

**Rivers Diverted**  
The Ngati-Awa had laid their dead for generations in Otara cemetery, situated between the Tarawera and Rangitahi Rivers and the sea.

The cemetery continued in use, and to the bones of the Ngati-Awa were added the dead of the Tuwharetoa and the Arawa and the Ngati-Rangitahi.

When the vast Rangitahi drainage scheme was undertaken in 1912, the joint cut of the Rangitahi and Tarawera Rivers at Matata was changed. The Rangitahi was given a new outlet at Puketapu, further along the coast, and the Tarawera was diverted through the sandhills and given a new outlet beside the old Otara cemetery.

During the construction of the Tarawera cut some of the graves were opened and the bones reburied in the reserve Otara cemetery adjoining the river.

A stone groyne was erected on the Matata side of the outlet, but on the eastern bank, on which the cemetery lay, the stone work was constructed only to the upriver end of the cemetery reserve.

**Skulls Found**

Over the years the Tarawera outlet chipped away much of the land between the cemetery and the river. In recent years the erosion became more pronounced, and this year it suddenly began to accelerate.

Several chains of the cemetery headland have now gone out to sea, and with it have gone some bones - how many no-one knows.

Residents have found skulls on the beach, and seen human bones sticking out of the cliffs overlooking the river.

At least five disinterred skeletons have been re-buried further back in the cemetery.

In the last few weeks the mouth of the Tarawera shifted suddenly several hundred yards down the beach, and the swirling river is now cutting deep into the cemetery reserve.

Tribal elder Brian Chaytor, of Matata, estimates that at least four chains of the cemetery have been washed away.

"I know of at least three bodies that have been washed into the river," he says. "It is time something was done urgently."

Mr Chaytor said he had been agitating for years to have the erosion halted before it was too late.

"I have been to the Government, to the drainage board, to the council, but nothing has been done," he said.

"I even led a deputation to Peter Fraser once, and he agreed it was an urgent case. We pointed out that the cemetery was there before the river was put through, and Mr Fraser said he would have the

matter put down for urgent investigation. Shortly afterwards his Government lost the election and nothing was done."

Mr Chaytor said there must be many hundreds of graves in the cemetery.

"I am 75, and I came to Matata when I was 18. The cemetery was full up then," he said.

"The cemetery is still in use. People have been buried there as recently as six months ago."

**Concerted Action**

Chairman of the Ngati-Rangitahi tribal committee, Mr J. Brady, committee secretary Neil Haurangi, and Arawa Trust board member Harry Semmens have decided to press for concerted action now, before more of the cemetery goes out to sea.

Mr Brady said the cemetery belonged to three tribes, and all would be asked to assist.

"We will call an area meeting of representatives of the Ngati-Rangitahi, the Tuwharetoa and the Arawa to decide what to do," he said.

The Rangitahi Drainage Board plans to take steps which will alleviate the immediate threat to the cemetery. They will set the bar as soon as tide and weather permits and attempt to divert the mouth back to the western groyne.

This will slow down the erosion of Otara but the tribal elders believe a new stone groyne on the eastern side will be required if the ancient cemetery is to remain a safe resting place for their ancestors.

By Ross Annabell

Figure four: "Nature Again Threatens Burial Place"

Source: *Whakatane Beacon* 1980

Modification of the river dynamics accelerated erosion along the edges of the urupā which has increasingly claimed the land resulting in disruption of graves situated along the coastal edges of the urupā. Residents have found

bones deposited on the beach and even washed out to sea in some cases. A newspaper article, dating August 1981, reports:

The tribal elders at Matata are uneasy. Odd skeletons have been tumbling out of the sandy cliffs for several years now as sea and river cut stealthily away at the sacred burial headland. Last week a howling easterly gale brought tribal uneasiness to a head. The river cut deep into the cemetery reserve. Tons of soil down into the Tarawera, leaving rows of ancient graves perched on the very brink of disinterment (*Whakatane Beacon* 1981)

The number (ten dating from 1980) of these early articles concerning this distress demonstrates how long this issue has been active in Matata. This distress was further inflamed when a proposal was put forward by a local developer to subdivide the eastern end of Kaokaoroa for beachside housing in 1980. Immediately this created an uproar of disapproval from local iwi, given that the land is believed to be wāhi tapu. However, despite adamant insistence from local Māori that the proposed area was a burial ground as well as linked to the battle of Kaokaoroa, these appeals were largely disregarded due to “no conclusive evidence” (*Whakatane Beacon* 1980). This type of wording can be examined further. Again the role of binaries comes into play as science appears to be automatically aligned with rationality and objectivity while demoting other forms of knowledge (in this case, Māori knowledge) and therefore perceived as the antithesis of science (Love 1997). According to this dichotomous thinking, indigenous knowledges are aligned with less rational systems of thought such as spirituality which in turn affects its status as ‘valid’ knowledge (Cloke & Johnston 2005). According to this thought systems, the term ‘conclusive’ commonly refers to ‘scientific’ evidence. This reliance on science to legitimize indigenous knowledge is a controversial topic within geography and other critical social sciences in debates over who has the power to define what is deemed ‘legitimate’ and the effects on the category defined as the ‘Other’. However, newspapers can also be used as a strategic tool for promoting the ‘Other’ as well. The following article, published in 1980, attracts attention from readers by careful



selection of language (“rudely washed out of their resting place”, “sinister ring”, “curse following”) (*Whakatane Beacon* 1980). It represents concern for the Otara urupā from a Māori perspective and also draws upon elements of spirituality and divine intervention by recalling the infamous Māori story of Rangitihī chief, Tuhoto Ariki <sup>8</sup>.

Despite adamant disapproval, heavy earth machinery began flattening out the area to make it suitable for development. Local Māori were not surprised at the number of times human bones were unearthed during this phase. Local resident Jack Brady is one of a number of local Māori who actively fought to expose the desecration to this wāhi tapu. The following passage was found in the local *Whakatane Beacon* in 1980 where Mr Brady expressed his concern to the local reporter:

“It’s our duty that people should know the situation...people planning to build a house on the land should be told what it is used for (*Whakatane Beacon* 1980a)”.

He goes on to insist that this is an issue of importance not just to Matata residents but to surrounding communities as well:

“I’d be failing in my duty if I didn’t make them aware of the situation. The area is sacred to Māoris and Pakehas alike” (*Whakatane Beacon* 1980a).

One of my research participants remembers these times well through the reactions of his father and other community elders:

My father ... and various others, when they started bulldozing, they had to go and pick the bones and re-bury them and what have you” (participant 1).

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<sup>8</sup> For information about ‘divine intervention’ in relation to the Matata flood, see Annabell 1981 and appendix 6 .

Following this initial subdivision, another proposal was initiated in 2003 to create a 15 lot subdivision further along the coastline of Matata. Originally being under the control of Ngati Awa, this area was confiscated by the Crown and given to the paramount chief of Te Arawa, Pohika Taranui, for services rendered during the battle of Kaokaoroa (Melville 2005a). According to this source, the land is now under the control of the Ngati Hinerangi Trust (see figure five and six). It was this trust that headed plans to subdivide the area for housing in order to create an “asset base” for trust holders (Whitwell 2003).



Figure five: “Bones lead to site ban”  
Source: Whitwell 2003a

Given the longstanding complexity of inter-Māori politics over legal rights to this land since colonial settlement, it is understandable that this subdivision proposal was again met with avid protest. Another local iwi representative and spokesperson Colleen Skerrett-White states that the sale of the subdivision:

compromises the integrity of Māori values in terms of our guardianship. The message that the (Ngati Hinerangi) trust is sending to young Māori

is that materialism is okay. That the system can be compromised for money. We consider it blood money (Whitwell 2003).

This passage indicates the emotional toll that this subdivision has had on Māori in terms of presenting new and awakening old issues concerning obligations as kaitiaki of the land. Other statements expressed in the above article are an example of local residents maintaining their role as kaitiaki despite the turbulent and often frustrating circumstances of the development of the subdivision:

we are pleased the trust has acknowledged the site as sacred. It has made our protests and searches all worthwhile. The development should never have happened (Whitwell 2003).

This provides an example of the power of emotion and its capacity to fuel social action and illustrates contemporary geographers' claims that emotions are indeed, "intensely political" (Jones 2005: 207). It is also an example of inter-Māori politics demonstrating the danger in essentialising binary categories. Within these categories, different opinions, perspectives and ideas can emerge destabilizing the notion of binaries as being pre-determined homogenous groups (Cloke & Johnston 2005). This has been the case for Māori at Matata where the ancestral traditions of each hapu influence their perspective and relations with surrounding iwi.

# Tensions simmer on site of another bones row

THE WHAKATANE BEACON FRIDAY, MAY 6, 2005  
KEITH MELVILLE

EFFORTS were being made on Wednesday for work to resume at the Ngati Hinerangi Trust subdivision in Matata as part of Environment Court attempts to mediate between the trust and those who want the subdivision stopped.

Human bones were found on the site in 2003 leading to a dispute between Maori over the ownership of the bones and whether the subdivision should be allowed to proceed. Work on the site stopped and has not resumed since.

Bones have been discovered in the area before and in other nearby subdivisions in the past 25 years and more human bones were found by archaeologists on Wednesday in an excavation ordered by the court as part of its mediation.

The subdivision was approved by Whakatane District Council several years ago after the owners had consulted Ngati Awa.

When bones were found in 2003, other iwi, including the Umutahi hapu of

Wars in 1864. As a result of the battle, land was confiscated from Ngati Awa and given to one of the victors, the paramount chief of Ngati Pikiao (Arawa), Pokiha Taranui, who fought with the Crown against the tribes of the east.

The land is now owned by the Ngati Hinerangi Trust and its chairman Don Bennett, a direct descendant of Pokiha Taranui, and other trust members were at a karakia ceremony at the site on Wednesday morning in preparation for the excavation work.

Also present were members of the New Zealand Historic Places Trust; Ngati Awa's Te Hau Tutua and Pouroto Ngaropo; Umutahi members John Peri and Anthony Olsen; and members of Ngati Rangitahi (Arawa).

The Historic Places Trust was represented to see if any further human remains could be found in the 16-lot residential subdivision, which the trust wants to sell on behalf of its beneficiaries.

Despite the powhiri and karakia and conciliatory words by Mr Bennett and Mr

Ngaropo, Mr Peri made it clear he felt the site was waahi tapu and that its sacredness had been disturbed. He said he was "angry with the dig" and did not want Mr Ngaropo to touch any more bones on the site.

Mr Ngaropo said those opposing the subdivision wanted it made into a Maori reserve to be controlled by them.

The bones already removed from the site are destined for a memorial nearby at Pohutukawa Square.

Mr Bennett said the trust was working toward closure. "It is not important anymore what they were fighting for. What is important is that we bring closure to this sorry part of our history."

He said all the tribes who fought in the battle would be acknowledged in the plaque at Pohutukawa Square.

Mr Ngaropo said it was a historic moment for tribal representatives to gather for the ceremony but the lack of unity was unfortunate. "He realised people were upset and angry."

Mr Bennett said the subdivision would be going ahead even if more bones were found.



JOHN PERI DON BENNETT

Tuwharetoa ki Kawerau and Ngati Rangitahi, wanted the subdivision stopped. They objected to Ngati Awa removing the bones and to not having been consulted.

The dispute mirrors the recent furore over the removal of two sets of bones by Auckland University archaeologists from the historic Kohika site at Matata, which has again set the iwi in opposition.

The bones are thought to be the remains of warriors who died when the four-day battle of Kaokoroa reached a climax near the old mouth of the Tarawera River in the Land

Figure six: "Tensions simmer on site on another bones row"  
Source: Melville 2005a

During this on-going debate, Matata was again struck with another situation which further compounded this issue, however this time it was in the form of

a natural disaster. On May 18<sup>th</sup> 2005, the town was struck by an intense debris flood. Surges of floodwater, debris and boulders travelled down from the upper ranges of Whakapoukorero (hill range adjacent to the township) and flowed towards the town through the Waitepuru, Waimea and Awatarariki stream outlets. The areas surrounding these outlets were severely affected, however the area beneath the Awatarariki stream was the most affected (see figure seven and eight). This stream cuts a deep route through the valley and provided an accessible passageway for the huge volume of floodwaters. The normal course of the stream flows northward towards the eastern end of Te Awa o te Atua. However, being inundated with floodwater, it overflowed into the adjacent subdivision, Kaokaoroa (see figure seven and eight).



Figure seven: Ariel Picture showing flood path from Awatarariki stream to the adjacent subdivision Source: McSaveney 2005

The sacredness of the Awatarariki valley is local knowledge to Māori. What makes this area particularly significant is the highly sacred status ascribed to it. It is held in high regard to many iwi of Matata as the location of ancient practices and burial. Written documents provided by Ngati Rangitihi refer to this highly significant area and one report in particular supports this informant's claim:

In effect, the entire Awatarariki gully is one large Ngati Rangitihi Urupā, with burial areas in the gully floor, high on ledges, in cliffs, ana (caves) in the gully walls and in a large burial cave. The last time the Awatarariki gully was used by Ngati Rangitihi as a burial place was in 1917 when bones were placed there after the scraping of the bones ceremony (Tangihia Consultants 2007 48).

While this is from a uniquely Rangitihi perspective, surrounding iwi also share similar affiliations to the area of Awatarariki. One participant added that the sacredness of Awatarariki was instilled in his whānau at a very young age. He remembers his parents insisting that it is an area that should be held in high regard and always afforded respect because of the ancient ancestors that were buried up there. He states:

“We were never let up there as children. Old people said “don’t go up there”, and that’s all there was to it. So we virtually kept right out of it, ah, when they did go up there, they had their tohunga with them and they said their prayers and everything before they went up there, yeah, so, it’s been an area we have kept out of and have been warned about I suppose, not to go fossicking around. The old people didn’t want us fiddling around with bones (participant 1).

Another local resident I talked to, shared their experience of entering Awatarariki, describing it as “overwhelming”. While it was difficult for her to describe her feelings, it became clear how important this area was in terms of evoking a sense of reconnection to her tipuna and being amidst a location enriched with her own tribal history (participant three). However, in contrast to this explanation, another informant stated how she just “wouldn’t even consider it” (going up there) and that she basically stayed away from that area *because* of its sacredness (participant six). Both informants are long time residents of Matata and these two brief examples show how notions of sacredness were instilled in them as they were growing up. Although their reactions to sacred spaces may seem different (e.g. retaining a sense of connection while up Awatarariki as opposed to not wanting to go up at all), both women were affected by their own understandings of the sacredness of



Awatarariki but responded to and respected the area in different ways, both in an attempt to retain their spiritual connection to the area. I talked to both women within a relatively short amount of time of each other and during these korero I found myself totally immersed in their conversations. It stirred up a variety of emotions in me such as spiritual curiosity, reverence, intrigue as well as a certain degree of fear and angst in relation to entry into these spaces. It was at this stage of the research process that I really became aware of the personal and emotional toll that this experience was having on me. While I was expecting to be empathetic and share similar personal feeling about notions of sacredness with the participants, I was not prepared for the deep sense of spiritual connection to the areas being discussed. Being amidst residents who openly and physically shared their feelings about certain areas of Matata acted to reaffirm my own Māori heritage and connection to Matata that up until recently I have been relatively disconnected with.

This highlights a beneficial component of emotional geography. While it has been widely acknowledged by academics that the researchers positionality does have bearing on the creation, direction and interactions with participants throughout the research process (see Cook 2005, Rose 1997 and England 1994), geographers take this assertion a step further by allowing the researcher to critically reflect, analyze and deconstruct their own experience. Talking with people about the discovery of bones often means delving into emotional terrain such as death and personal experience so I feel that by including the effect of these discussions on myself adds to the uniqueness of this type of research.

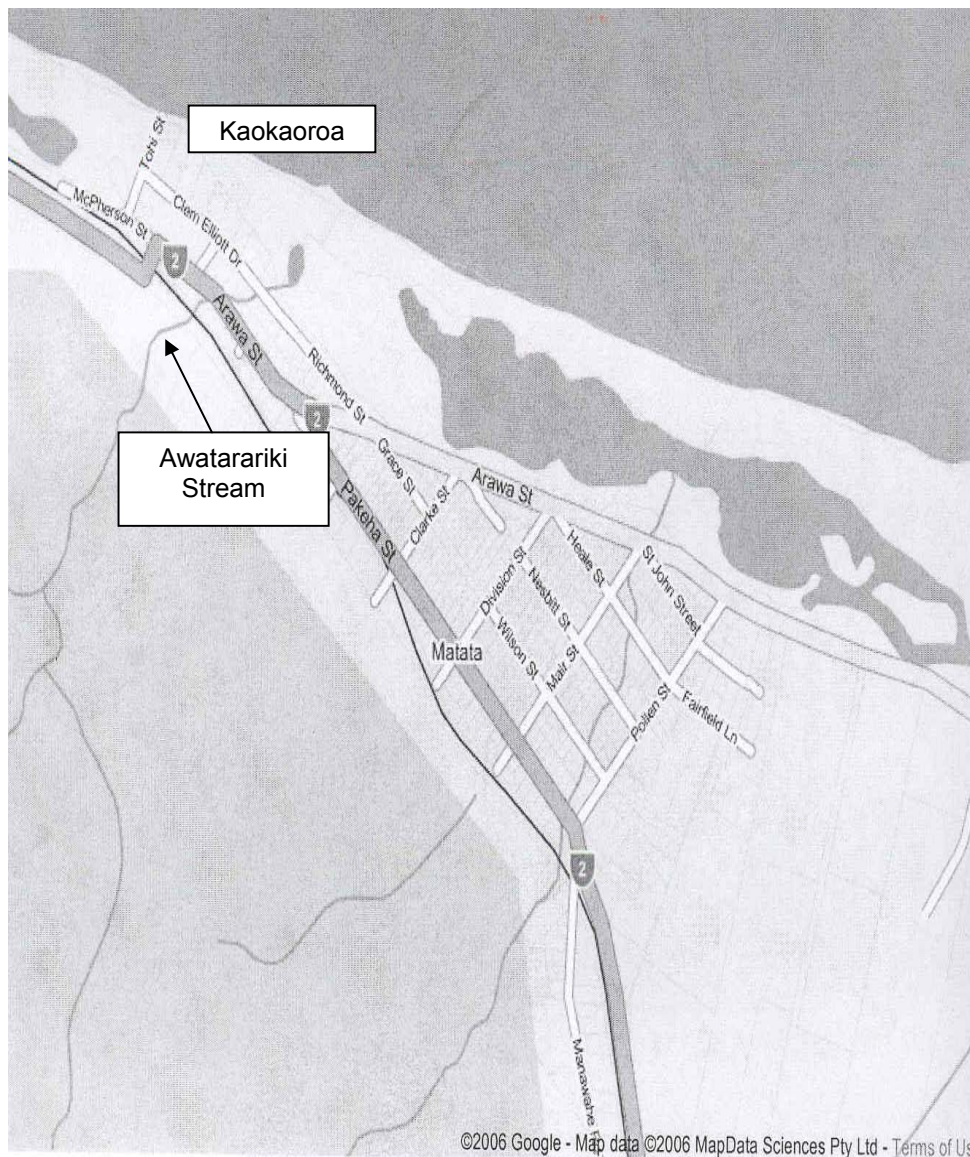


Figure eight: Wāhi Tapu sites at Matata (approximate location)  
Source: Google Maps 2007

On the 10 June 2005, the *Daily Post* contained a front page article entitled “Skull found in House”. This skull was discovered by cleaners who were attending to a house which was part of the residential subdivision of Kaokaoroa. Alarmed at this discovery they contacted local authorities which then contacted local iwi. The experience of local iwi who responded to this event is expressed during a highly emotional scene with karakia and



ceremonial practice. Despite the ancient origin of the skull, the intimate acknowledgment of shared whakapapa and attachment was felt by kaumatua. The following statement indicates the very visceral display of emotions that were felt:

In terms of the way the service was handled, although brief, kaumatua performed a karanga and the tears that flowed were very real... *the moving scene reiterated that our battle to have Kaokaoroa preserved has never been a power play but about letting our Tipuna rest in peace*" (Shanks 2005a– emphasis added).

The italicized section reinforces the underlying motivation behind protecting wāhi tapu and again reinforces the assertion that emotions are caught up in politics. Although there is a raft of complicated tribal politics within Matata, it is important to note that iwi share the same goal which is a collective responsibility to ensure that their ancestors receive the reverence they deserve as opposed to using these sorts of situations to assert their tribal authority over one another.

I asked a research participant where they thought this skull had originated from and he suspected that it may have been transported along the Awatarariki River from one of the many ancient ancestral burial caves found within the valley. When asked how he reacted to this discovery, he stated

We weren't really surprised, probably more got washed out than that (Participant 1).

He also mentioned two other partial skulls that had been unearthed in the flood debris. He referred me to an archaeological assessment which was carried out on these bones which concluded:

The remains of three individuals were recovered from flood debris in October 2005. All three exhibit diagnostic features suggesting that they were Māori and lived during pre-European contact or early contact period. Two individuals were likely buried where they were found while

the remains of the third individual was probably deposited in a cave and somehow found its way into flood debris within a house seaward of the Matata burial ground (Tangihia Consultants 2007 2).

Further research into the possible origins of the skull revealed other versions. Some believe that the skull was unearthed during an archaeological dig by the Historic Places Trust. In response to the dissatisfaction felt by Māori with the 'inconclusive results' (see page 65) of former investigations, this dig was initiated to quantify claims of the existence of a pre-colonial designated urupā.

The process of attempting to somehow 'prove' the actual origins of ancestral bones is not the objective of this discussion, rather it is about highlighting how, according to western discourse, knowledge needs to be confirmed by science in order to be considered legitimate (Love 1997). The archaeological report mentioned above highlights the point that in order for historical Māori knowledge to be considered legitimate, archaeological assessment was needed to scientifically confirm what local iwi already knew (see Brown 2006). Tuhiwai-Smith (1999) notes "authorities and outsiders are often called in to verify, comment upon and give judgments about the validity of indigenous claims to cultural beliefs, values, ways of knowing and historical accounts" (72). In other words, finding the skulls as well as tribal knowledge was not considered sufficient evidence; an intensive archaeological examination was deemed to be needed.

In reviewing international literature on indigenous knowledges, the issue of unearthing ancestral bones is a common and much debated issue (see Hubert 1992). The following quote indicates similar difficulties facing other indigenous populations:

From the viewpoint of many indigenous groups the bones of their ancestors, their own identity and oral traditions are part of their spiritual lives and cannot and should not be subject to scientific authentication (Cantwell 2000 17).

Knowledge and location of ancestral bones has circulated within local iwi for generations and has acted as its own 'protection mechanism' within and between tribes. It is at the intersection where local indigenous knowledge is questioned by western institutions that cause so much angst and confusion. These discoveries are deeply emotional times for the living ancestors already and the suspicion or failure to acknowledge the importance or even existence of these bones adds further anxiety to this sensitive situation.

The purpose of this chapter was to emphasis the sacredness of the body and the cultural practices that accompany this worldview. Understanding how the body is perceived is key to better recognising how the boundaries of life and death are openly transgressed, not only in ceremonial settings but how this tikanga is incorporated into everyday life as well. An important theme of this chapter is the role of emotion in creating and maintaining Māori identity which is a fundamental difference between Māori and western culture. This distinction is perhaps the underlying theme that flows throughout the chapter, that is, how western knowledge is privileged over other alternative forms of knowledges, in this case, Māori knowledge. This discussion sets the foundation for the next chapter which examines two particular institutional responses (that are based upon western discourse) to sacred spaces in Aotearoa, academic interest and local authority involvement.

## **Chapter five**

### **Regulating the sacred**

Living along the coastline has always been an attractive idea for many New Zealanders. Being a small island nation, the intimate proximity to the beach has meant that trips to New Zealand beaches have been a common pastime. However the shift from the once popular 'bach' type holiday home to the more apartment style residence is becoming an increasingly common phenomenon attracting substantial increases in coastal land and property value (Bayleys 2007). This desire for coastal property has caused some real complications in terms of the protection of ancient wāhi tapu sites throughout New Zealand. Traditionally, early Māori settlements were commonly founded along strategic coastal locations. Coastal locations were often chosen for practical reasons such as accessibility to internal tidal river systems, high coastal hill ranges for visual advantages and access to kaimoana and mahinga kai. Functional communities were set up and boundaries and occupancy were officiated through the laws of ahi ka (Stokes 1987 121). In contemporary Māori society this affiliation with ancestral sites of historical significance continues. The problem arises as the on-going drive for economic development coincides with sites that are considered to be wāhi tapu for surrounding iwi (Beston 2006 & Harmsworth 2005). As a consequence, human bones and artefacts can be unearthed during preparation and construction during these types of projects.

The complicated issue of what to do when human bones are discovered has been an on-going and contentious issue (Zimmerman 1989). Within Aotearoa, a highly publicized case has been the subdivision of Kaokaoroa as mentioned in earlier chapters. This localized example of Matata is however, part of a much broader and universal debate about who owns the past and who defines the procedures for dealing with such discoveries. The previous chapter examined the situation at Matata where the ongoing discovery of

ancestral bones has created a fraught and emotional situation for local iwi. I included a discussion of the cultural factors such as tikanga and traditional protocol that contribute to an approach to death and ancestral bones that are caught up in a complex web of sacredness, identity, embodiment and emotion. I argue that much of this ideologically clashes with western hegemonic discourses. I now widen the scale to consider the dominant discourses that flow throughout western institutional thought concerning death and the body and the influence of this disembodied system of thinking on institutional responses to sacred spaces in Aotearoa. Firstly I draw on the work of archaeologists (Hubert 1994 and Farr 2002) who also engage with the issue of what to do with bones after they are unearthed. Many of these archaeologists are beginning to think critically about the type of methods they employ within the discipline. I then locate this international debate within the context of Matata by examining archaeological interest within certain sites and spaces, namely, an area known as Te Kohika and the Awatarariki stream (mentioned earlier). Thirdly, I review certain national legislation that directly includes reference to wāhi tapu such as the Treaty of Waitangi and the Resource Management Act in order to convey how some of the current provisions can be both enabling and disabling in terms of protecting cultural sites such as wāhi tapu.

### **Digging up the sacred**

Archaeology has been haunted by the influence of Eurocentric discourse. Early archaeology was infused with colonial discourse in which there existed a pre determined 'right' to enter, dig up and discover the histories of other cultures. It was heavily characterized by negative and 'essentialist' terms that remain problematic in contemporary society. Not surprisingly, indigenous populations have had a history of distrust of archaeologists (Farr 2002). Archeologist Larry Zimmerman (1989) notes how past archaeology was based upon a pretence to record ancient history of indigenous people before it was 'lost forever' or before cultures became 'extinct'; a belief he states, is a 'peculiarly archaeology-centered view' (64). It is this type of mentality which is

caught up in wider ideological western processes that has systematically divided the world into 'East' and 'West'. This dichotomy based thinking contributes to the distancing of 'us' (west) from 'them'(east) which has powerful disempowering consequences for those labelled as 'them' (Mohammad 2001). These colonial underpinnings are important to note as they contribute to suspicion and distrust towards archaeological research, mainly in regard in the unearthing, removing and displaying of ancestral bones, which has unfortunately been experienced by many indigenous cultures of the world (Hubert 1992).

Archaeologists are increasingly being held to account for their perspectives and approaches to the discovery and unearthing of human bones, after all, human remains and artefacts are central points of interest to these disciplines (Layton 1989). Anthropologist Robert Layton is just one of many commentators who have contributed to this area of academic scholarship. He acknowledges the critique and challenges archaeologists face concerning the methods, theories and eurocentric assumptions that have traditionally underpinned this discipline in relation to research into ancient indigenous populations. He joins the wave of contemporary scholars who are pushing for a critical 'reappraisal' of the effects of such research (Layton 1989 18). Anne Marie Cantwell (2000) also contributes as she takes a candid journey into the ethical, moral, personal and academic dilemmas surrounding discoveries of human bones. She insists that the active role of indigenous communities is having a positive (although still problematic) effect in contemporary archaeology. Cantwell (2000) believes it is part of a social movement which is redefining the power relations that has traditionally seen indigenous cultures intruded upon, ignored, dug up and explained according to western ideals. The following section looks into some of the responses of local iwi members and their reactions to the institutional presence in Matata and how their continual activism has worked to reshuffle the power dynamics between them and the local council.

Given its historical significance and accessible coastal location, the area of Matata has been of particular interest to archaeologists (Irwin 2004). Research has revealed valuable clues into pre-European settlement as well as help piece together events such as Kaokaoroa (see Boyack 1987). However, access and rights to carry out archaeological examination in order to obtain this information has been challenged by some local Māori. One particular area which has attracted considerable attention since its discovery in 1972 is the former swamp pa, Te Kohika (see figure nine). Conveniently located at the intersection of the Tarawera and Rangitaiki rivers, the swamp's composition has preserved many artefacts and organic remains of this small settlement which as archaeologists argue, provides a unique opportunity to examine this pre-historic Māori village and the people that once occupied this area.

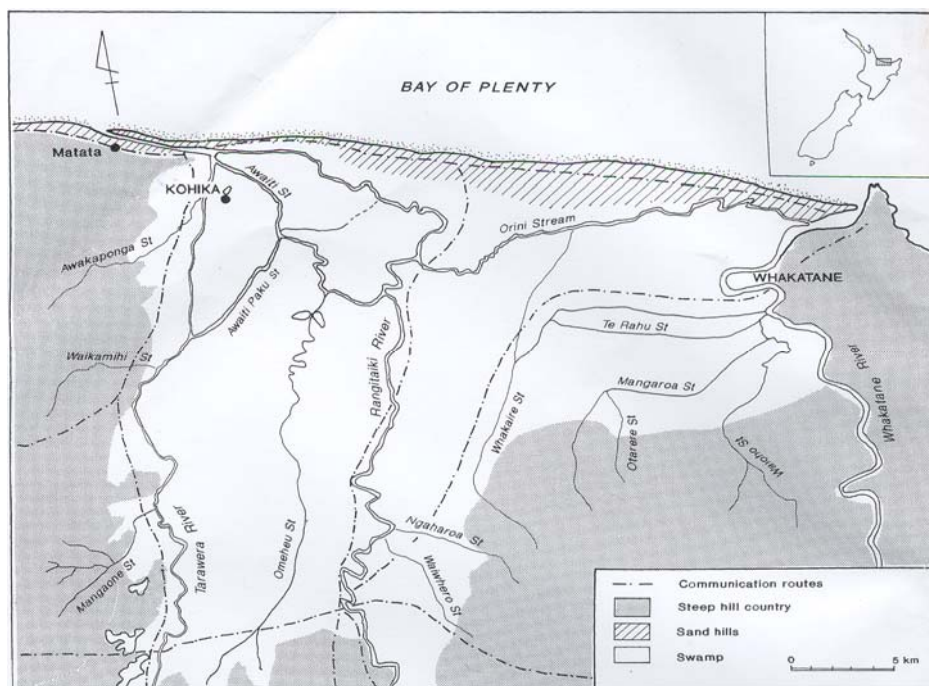


Figure nine: Map showing the location of Kohika, Matata, New Zealand  
Source: Irwin 2004

More recently, Te Kohika has come under the spotlight as archaeologists from Auckland University began excavating the site again. This has angered

some members of local iwi who claim that they were not informed about the University's plans to conduct further research. Not only has this created a clash of priorities between certain Māori rights over their land and taonga and archaeological interests but it has also worked to upset already contentious inter-iwi relations between Tuwharetoa ki Kawerau and Ngati Awa (Akuhata 2007).

The increased presence of scientific interest has been noticed since the flood as well. One participant referred to it as an 'academic hub' meaning that it has become the focus around the country for its perceived geological and archaeological potential, particularly after the flood (participant four). For example, as part of the natural hazards programme at the University of Auckland, the course involves a fieldtrip to Matata where students are encouraged to 'investigate the causes of the flood' (University of Auckland 2007). This has, in many cases, added to the emotionally charged experience for local Māori as academic personnel acquire information that is often hugely significant in terms of their spiritual attachment to the land, again, inflaming past suspicions about the dissemination of culturally sensitive information into the public arena.

The dig at Te Kohika came at a time when tensions were already high over proposed flood prevention schemes proposed by the Whakatane District Council. Given the impact of the 2005 flood and the destruction it caused, the council became preoccupied with implementing future flood protection/mitigation plans. The council proposed a 17 metre high dam to be constructed in the Awatarariki gully, designed to "retain large debris material" but also built to "convey floodwater and debris flood flows" (Whakatane District Council 2005). The dam was based on international designs in similar topographical circumstances (McSaveney *et al* 2005). Immediately after this proposal was announced, it was met with heavy disapproval by many Māori on the basis that it would consequently mean that the highly sacred area of Awatarariki would be interfered with during the initiation, construction and



maintenance stages and increase human traffic throughout the area. A shared opinion of all of the research participants was that supporting this proposal would directly impede, and in many ways contradict their role as kaitiaki. When asked how he personally felt about the dam proposal, a research participant responded:

Yeah well it's quite offensive really cause we have notified the council back in 2003 about the claim on the gully there. The situation, the burial caves up there, there's not even just caves, just about every ledge has got bones on it, it's the whole thing and often they are hard to spot. You have to go high up on one side, suddenly you see a couple of skulls sitting on the ledge there, under a cave or something like that (Participant 1).

This opinion was shared by all participants that spoke about the proposed dam. The fear is that people and heavy machinery would disrupt bones and desecrate the sacred spaces.

I became very interested in this issue of access into tapu areas and the boundaries between sacred (tapu) and everyday (noa) spaces. I asked informants to note the changes in human activity in and around some of Matata's sacred spaces. In reference to Awatarariki, it seems that prior to the flood, the gully access was primarily used for hunters and trampers who usually were well informed about the sacred status of the area (participant 3). However, the huge volumes of water that passed through the valley during the flood has physically changed the landscape, making the entrance to the valley more accessible. This major event has undoubtedly aroused the curiosity of various scientists as it had provided an opportunity to examine the geomorphic transformation that the flood had caused (see Auckland University 2007). There seemed to be a general consensus that as long as these various groups took the time to do some background research about the area, and contacted the appropriate people (such as kaumatua) before entering and respected the space, it was generally acceptable. This included

contacting local iwi or police about any instances where human bones were discovered.

Just ordinary people walking up there, not doing any harm. It's not really offensive but it's only when they start interfering in the remains and things (Participant 1).

This particular research participant went on to describe other instances where he has noticed disregard for particular areas. The following remark refers to the actions of the Department of Conservation. While he recognized the good intentions of DOC, it nonetheless demonstrates, once again, the complicated issues surrounding access and to wāhi tapu areas and knowledge of where these sites are located:

They [DOC] were just digging anywhere. They didn't check with us or anything if it was a burial ground or anything like that. Yeah, it's just something you have to live with I suppose. I rush down there and say "oh don't dig there, whatever you do" and they don't. I'd point out a specific thing but you have to be on the ball. You have to know what's going on. Sometimes you go down there and see a digger working in the lagoon<sup>9</sup> and oh my god.... (Participant 1).

This comment is interesting in terms of understanding the way this participant felt compelled to regulate public space. In order to protect wāhi tapu he continues to keep surveillance of the areas. David Sibley's (1995) notion of "liminal zones" (33) offers some useful insights in understanding public and private boundaries. What constitutes 'private' and 'public' has emerged out of western epistemology and is not necessarily shared by other cultures. The term 'kaitiaki' (mentioned earlier) is often translated to mean guardianship or protector which is a collective understanding between Māori to look after and

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<sup>9</sup> The lagoon is also known as "Te Awa o te Atua" meaning "River of the Gods". It is considered to be Wāhi tapu. According to Ngati Awa tradition, this area was named by Toroa, chief of the Mataatua waka. See Brown 2006, 24.

protect the natural domains of the environment. This directly disrupts the concept of distinct and divisible private properties or boundaries<sup>10</sup>.

In addition, I became interested in the effect that natural disasters can have on people's sense or perception of boundaries. To help contextualize this point, it is useful to visit media and personal interest in the destruction of property at Matata. Houses that were in the direct line of destruction were vacant and inhabitable. The human interest of this sudden and intense flood created large crowds of curious people. People could be seen wandering around, rummaging for remains, looking into windows of houses. These behaviours could easily be deemed as socially inappropriate in everyday circumstances because it disrupts the ingrained idea of private boundaries (Sibley 1995, also see footnote 3 page 25). However, this is actually fairly common in disaster stricken areas. This can be seen post Hurricane Katrina in New Orleans (Hurricane Katrina.org 2006). The destruction became such a point of human fascination that this interest seemed to somehow override the fact that these houses, although in ruins, were still private property and that the residents still retained a certain degree of emotional link to that particular space. Like Teather (1999) suggests "we grow attached to places – whether they are in a city or the country- are defensive about them when they are threatened, and feel bereft when they are destroyed" (2). Sibley's notion of liminal spaces can be applied again:

The mixing of categories... by the intersections of sets, creates liminal zones or spaces of ambiguity and discontinuity...there is always some uncertainty about where the edge of Category A turns into the Category not – A. for the individual or group socialised into believing that the separation of categories is necessary or desirable, the liminal zone is a source of anxiety. It is a source of abjection, one which should be eliminated in order to reduce anxiety, but this is not always possible. Individuals lack the power to organise their world into crisp sets and so eliminate spaces of ambiguity (32).

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<sup>10</sup> I am not suggesting that boundaries are in any way irrelevant within Māori culture, but I make the point that they may emerge out of a different paradigm of thought which influences the way iwi may perceive and interact with various elements of the environment.

In terms of disaster stricken areas, the boundaries that once defined 'home' (and private) can be blurred and unstable becoming "spaces of ambiguity" (32). I apply this idea to examine the effect of disasters like the Matata flood on wāhi tapu where the actual event can confuse the boundaries between everyday spaces (A: privileged) and sacred spaces (Not –A Othered). What then, did this mean for the ancient burial caves of Awatarariki? Would the flood alter the status of this wāhi tapu? Would the rush to protect Matata from future floods override the acknowledgment of a sacred space (that has, and still remains, a fundamental component to iwi and hapu identity of Matata)? Many of the informants shared these concerns which have been a motivating factor for remaining active in confronting the council during consultation phases to push for alternative protection mechanisms. As pointed out by a participant, the deep connection between ancient ancestors and living Māori still remains and to disrupt the resting places of those ancestors can create a 'deep sense of distress' (participant 4). It is important to mention here that hapu and iwi representatives do not deny the urgency to implement protection from future flooding, however, there is a collective drive for less intrusive means of flood protection and to ensure that appropriate tikanga is still practiced by people entering wāhi tapu. This poses some complex problems for the council based on the fundamental issue of how to incorporate indigenous knowledge and perspectives into a natural hazard framework which is heavily dictated by western paradigms of thought and predominately based upon international responses to flood management (see Brown 2006). Incorporation of indigenous knowledges in natural hazard management was a core feature of my directed study in 2006. A discussion with a local resident sums up the frustration felt by many community members relating to the acknowledgment and attitude towards alternative ideas and concepts during consultation phases:

When it came to the recovery of the flood, everybody that's got a degree, except a Māori degree, gets listened to *but* the people that

have lived here and I don't mean the people that have just come ten minutes ago, the people that have lived here all their life...(Former research participant: see Brown 2006 31 – my emphasis ).

Placed alongside other countries, the on-going struggle for indigenous recognition has resulted in some positive changes. The New Zealand Government implemented legislation in response to this ongoing concern from local Māori who have questioned their commitment to uphold the obligations of the Treaty of Waitangi. As insisted by Manatu Māori (1992) any type of discussion concerning wāhi tapu protection needs to consider the Treaty of Waitangi.

### **Legislation**

Māori participation in environmental planning continues to be a topical issue within Aotearoa. The creation of the Resource Management Act in 1991 was initiated by the Government in response to frustrated and dissatisfied iwi. One of the most pronounced concerns is the exclusion from the decision making process concerning issues that are of particular cultural significance to Māori. Amongst these areas of concern is the protection of wāhi tapu (Love 2001). There has been much published on the misunderstandings and confusion created by the Treaty due to cross cultural differences and misinterpretation and it is a topic which has been subject to ongoing debate (see Paterson 1999, Berke, Erickson *et al* 2002, Johnston 2005 and Love 2001). Article Two of the treaty is particularly relevant in the discussion of sacred sites to Māori. Under the Treaty of Waitangi,

the Crown guaranteed to protect the Chief's absolute authority [tino rangitiratanga] over their lands, villages, and all possessions including their toanga, or treasures as long as they wished to retain them (Manatu Māori 1991 2).

The intention of the Resource Management Act is to incorporate governmental obligations set out in the Treaty and to aid in decision making

processes concerning cultural issues such as wāhi tapu. Section six and eight of the Resource Management Act includes specific reference to wāhi tapu:

**Sec 6:** In achieving the purpose of this act, all persons exercising functions and powers under it, in relation to managing the use, development and protection of natural and physical resources, shall recognize and provide for the following matters of national importance:

(e) the relationship of Māori and their culture and traditions with their ancestral lands, waters, sites, wāhi tapu, and other taonga (Parliamentary Counsel Office 2008 ).

**Sec 8:** Shall take into count the principals of the Treaty of Waitangi (Parliamentary Counsel Office 2008).

The usefulness of these policies in terms of implementation has come under criticism. Berke, Erickson *et al* question the incorporation of ambiguous language:

While these provisions provide considerable opportunity for local government to enter into resource management partnerships with Māori, there are obstacles to effective implementation. First, there is skepticism concerning the imprecise wording of each provision of the Resource Management Act... “shall recognize and provide” under section 6, “have particular regard” under section 7 and to “take into account” under section 7 are somewhat vague and open to wide variation in interpretation (2002 118).

There is also other legislation that is concerned with sacred sites such as the Historic Places Trust. Established in 1954 the Trust mission statement is to:

promote the identification, protection, preservation and conservation of the historical and cultural heritage of New Zealand (Historic Places Trust 2007).

The key objective being to:

incorporate the preservation of historic places into the resource management framework introduced in the Resource Management Act (Historic Places Trust 2007).

This means that District Councils have a responsibility to ensure the protection of various historic sites and culturally significant areas within their jurisdiction. Councils need to consult with iwi however, as the situation at Te Kohika in Matata demonstrates, this is not a straight forward process. Vested interests of iwi or hapu can sometimes mean revisiting and often inflaming historical disputes over land occupancy and decision making over certain wāhi tapu. Berke, Ericson *et al* elaborate by stating “there can be several tribal areas within a district that increases the difficulty in establishing partnerships between tribes and Councils” (2002 118). While the local council may insist that they are consulting with the appropriate iwi representatives, this may be challenged by other surrounding iwi who trace ancestral links to that same area. This is an issue that feeds into wider archaeology debates concerning the discovery of bones and how to deal with them and who to return them to. A research participant shared that on the occasion where human bones are found and the identity is both known and unknown, there should be certain procedures that are followed:

When we know they are our bones, we make a hell of a fuss!  
(Participant 1).

He goes on to say how most urupā have a special designated areas where bones are reburied, however every iwi has their own way of dealing with their tipuna and it is this point that can cause tension between the iwi and authorities:

We’re quite happy to go and handle those [bones] ourselves, we don’t need anyone to handle our own people. Where our relations are concerned, they have their own plot, we don’t just put them in a bag and bury them in an area you know (Participant 1).

When I asked him about the council’s response to the reburial and consultation processes, he responded:

The trouble is Ngati Awa are totally different aye. Our history is Te Arawa and Ngati Awa is Mataatua and we handle things differently and the council doesn't appreciate that, especially when it comes to dealing with koiwi (Participant 1).

To put this into context, it is useful to revisit Te Kohika. The team of archaeologists were working as part of a "joint program with Ngati Awa" which was being funded by a "2005 Marsden grant administered by the Royal Society of New Zealand for a three year project that commenced in 2005" (Akuhata 2007 1) (see appendix seven). However, as mentioned earlier, Ngati Awa are not the only iwi who share an interest in the Matata rohe. This can make the consultation process very complicated for the local council. A Ngati Tuwharetoa ki Kawerau representative stated that "they had been unaware a dig was happening and were angry and disappointed at not being consulted or allowed to monitor it" (Akuhata 2007 1). When I asked another research participant what their reaction to the dig was, they stated that they were upset that the council were not taking into account the fact that there is more than one tribe "that calls Matata home" (participant ). It is important to note that while the dig at Te Kohika may have been approved by certain members of Ngati Awa, the fact that the presence of the archaeologists was not made public was of great concern, which aroused suspicion:

We want assurances and it is important to know why they didn't come and talk to us (*Whakatane Beacon* 2007 1).

This quote relates to an incident where three iwi representatives visited the site with the intention of meeting with the students to determine if anything was going to be taken away from the site, however instead of discussing the issue, upon arrival at the scene, the team decided to turn away from the site instead of talking with the three representatives (participant two). This caused frustration amongst these representatives as

Ngati Tuwharetoa ki Kawerau was assured it would be consulted prior to subsequent excavation (Akuhata 2007 1).



There are a number of important themes that have emerged in this chapter that I want to reiterate before moving on. I wanted to convey how the issue of dealing with human bones is of international consternation. Contemporary archaeologists are moving towards alternative approaches in an attempt to distance themselves from the eurocentric undertones of traditional archaeology. However at the centre of these debates remain some complicated questions like the rights to determine the future of unearthed human bones and the protection of sacred sites. Of course, this involves a web of cultural, religious and social ideas of appropriate and ethical behaviour. I explore the notion of boundaries and the connection between these boundaries and other binary categories within western society. I purport that this concept may not always be shared by other cultures. Within Māori culture, this idea interferes and in many ways contradicts the principle of kaitiaki. When unexpected and stressful situations occur (such as the Matata flood), it can create cultural confusion as different worldviews collide. Instances where sacred sites, places and things are concerned can create additional strain on communities in an already fraught situation. Therefore this chapter has been about focusing on a case study at Te kohika and examining some relevant sections of legislation and some of the complications of implementation. I now conclude this chapter with an important but often overlooked component of a Māori approach to environmental management, that of silent files.

### **Mapping the silence**

In this section I discuss silences in relation to sacred sites within Aotearoa. More specifically, I re-examine the notion of 'paradoxical space' (Rose 1993) by exploring the ways that silences can be empowering as a (c)over form of resistance as well as contributing to complicated positions for Māori under the current legislation which defines councils' statutory obligations concerning wāhi tapu in Aotearoa. This section will investigate critically, the issue of mapping sacred sites and the problems this process can create between those doing the mapping (councils and other institutional organizations) and

those being mapped (Māori and wāhi tapu). I take a reflexive stance by acknowledging how I too, create and embody “paradoxical spaces” as I adopt a transitory position, moving between categories of ‘mapped’ (insider: as my personal connection to Matata influences my position as a researcher) and ‘mapper’ (outsider: by joining the academic interest in Matata).

An important theme associated with sacred sites from an indigenous point of view is the institutional preoccupation with mapping the world. Mapping is a technique bound within a political system of power and domination and has very real implications between those who have the power to include and exclude certain areas, things, or people and those who are *being* mapped by others (Black 2000). In this case, it is the implications for Māori communities whose sacred sites are being mapped that are the focus. Traditionally mapping, surveying and locating ancient sites has been considered a relatively standard component of most scientific research, including archaeological research. In fact, mapping, surveying and locating almost anything has become a preoccupation with western society (Black 2000). Reliance on cartography is caught up in a complex system of political control over boundaries, authority and ownership and it is this rush to somehow prove ownership that has had some troubling consequences for ancestral lands of indigenous cultures (Layton 1989).

Gareth Jones and Robyn Harris (1998) have contributed considerable time to exposing the seemingly discordant motivations of archaeologists and indigenous peoples concerning the knowledge and location of sacred sites and places. What makes their combined work particularly pertinent to this research is that it focuses on this issue in direct relation to “human skeletal remains and to dead human bodies” (253). They talk of the growing concern between “two opposing forces, western scientific values of archaeology and a global renaissance among indigenous peoples (253)” and the subsequent actions of institutional authorities.

Much of the justification of mapping stems from the insistence that if locations of sites of significance are located, mapped and made public, there will be greater awareness amongst the wider society. While this may seem useful as a protection mechanism, it is a much more involved issue. This idea assumes that the quest of knowledge and ownership of knowledge is a human right and that information should be considered communal property (Stokes 1998). However, as many scholars such as Tuhiwai Smith (1998), Stokes (1998), Te Awekotuku (1991) Bishop (1996) insist, this is a viewpoint that is not shared by many Māori. The acquisition of knowledge is controlled and selective accorded to traditional tikanga practices (Te Awekotuku 1991). This traditional tikanga advocates responsible dissemination of historical information which can present problems in terms of legislative requirements of council authorities. For example, the 'sacredness' of the Awatarariki valley mentioned in Chapters four and is shared within the community of Matata. During korero with my research participants, many shared with me stories that they had been told as children about the area, others shared more personal stories about their own experience being in and around the valley. This knowledge sharing is important; it reaffirms their relationship with the land, with their tipuna and each other as tangata whenua. Because Māori is an oral culture, this type of historical information is commonly held by the kaumatua of the iwi meaning that this information may not be recorded in written form (Mead 2004). Unlike the common perception within western society that historical information is readily accessible, in some circumstances it is not.

This poses some questions. Under the Resource Management Act, local authorities have a responsibility to consult with local iwi and hapu on issues relating to their cultural sites. There is however, what is known as 'silent files', which is an important aspect to mention in terms of protection of wāhi tapu sites. A silent file, usually "kept in confidence by the appropriate tribe, subtribe, or family, lists the location of that groups wāhi tapu" (Manatu Māori 1992 9). The intention of these files is so that the general location of sacred sites can be included within local authority plans, meaning that

if any development was planned in that title, then the local authority would have the responsibility to check with the holders of the silent file to ensure that wāhi tapu were not threatened before approval was given for development was approved (Manatu Māori 1992 9).

Silent files are, therefore, an example of destabilizing the power relations between local councils and local iwi by making sure that only certain information regarding their wāhi tapu is made public and ensuring, legally, that iwi representatives are informed about any proposal to develop. As encouraging as this appears as a means of retaining a certain amount of authority over sacred areas:

it must be noted, however, that it is the local authority that will decide whether the location and particulars of a wāhi tapu will be made public, by weighting Māori values against “public interest” (Manatu Māori 1992 9).

When I brought up public access to, and mapping of, wāhi tapu one research participant acknowledged that there seemed to be no easy way to tackle the issue, he states:

It's probably hard for them [the council] because we have kept everything quiet and secret, you know, so if people go wondering in there and start digging we can really only blame ourselves (Participant 1).

The example of silent files and attitudes shown in the above quotation is an interesting example of how silences can work to both subvert dominant institutional frameworks while also having a converse effect. This highlights a paradoxical position for Māori in terms of utilizing silences to their advantage but also remaining confined in terms of political power in Aotearoa. It is perhaps these types of legislative clauses that can reinforce and strengthen dominant institutive powers. This issue also feeds into a larger criticism of western cartographic ideology, in that in order for a place to be considered

legitimate or even in some cases existent, it needs to be mapped in order to be 'objectively' proven (Black 2000).

## **Chapter 6**

### **Concluding discussion**

The sacredness of land is first and foremost an emotional experience. It is that feeling of unity with a place that is complete, whatever specific feelings it may engender in an individual (Swan 1993 29).

At the beginning of my thesis I discussed the multiple meanings of the term 'sacred'. It is a concept that is subject to personal interpretation and influenced by a host of cultural, religious and spiritual factors. Perhaps this is why researching the sacred is often considered a complex task. As anthropologists have long suggested, the intangible notion of sacredness is often closely related to other universal commonalities such as birth and death. Therefore academics from a range of disciplines have been engaging in on-going debates about how to learn more about the significance of sacredness to various cultures of the world.

Existing literature notes the difficult and often self reflexive questions that researchers face such as cross-cultural interpretations and the effect of one's own belief systems on the research. However, a collective idea that emerges from this literature is that these issues, although complex, should not deter academic response but should in fact motivate sensitive research since exploring the meanings attributed to sacred spaces, things and places can expose related cultural ideas about land, the environment and identity. I suggest that while studying sacredness has often been led by anthropologists and archaeologists, geographers can offer invaluable insights as well. Concentrating on sacredness thorough the lens of cultural geography can reveal the layers of social and cultural constructs that determine how and why particular spaces, things and places are considered sacred. It can provide a better understanding into the connection between the concept of sacred and other areas of interest to geographers such as ideas of home, belonging, attachment to land and identity.

“Upsetting Boundaries: Sacred Spaces of Matata” then, is an opportunity to explore the meaning of, and attachment to, wāhi tapu through the contributions of local Māori of Matata. At the centre of this discussion is the (re) discovery and unearthing of ancestral bones within these sacred spaces. Matata provided an opportunity to examine some of the cross cultural perspectives concerning notions of sacredness, sacred space and human bones. My intention is to demonstrate that the emotional experiences of local iwi and hapu of Matata concerning their cultural sites occurs throughout Aotearoa and is also a reflection of an universal struggle for indigenous knowledges to not only be acknowledged but to be considered an alternative and as legitimate as western knowledge. This of course, is a broad issue and is culturally specific; however I argue that to better understand indigenous perspectives involves learning more about the ideas, values and worldviews that inform these knowledges.

This is where the value of this research lies. Through talking and sharing stories about personal experiences about sacred spaces of Matata, the research participants provided invaluable insights into why Māori often actively protest against development or any other event that threatens wāhi tapu. The unearthing of ancestral bones at Matata presents a situation where Māori and western worldviews have inevitably collided. The underlying argument that flows throughout this thesis is that by taking the time to appreciate this ‘middle ground’ between Māori and Pakeha perspectives may help to foster a more cooperative, patient and mutually beneficial relationship. While this may seem rather idealistic, given the infamous reputation of colonisation and the associated negative cultural and social consequences for Māori, the alternative is to remain in a current state of ‘cultural confusion’ as the multiplicity of worldviews and perspectives continue to be misunderstood. In light of these considerations, this thesis encourages geographers to bring spirituality, sacredness and mythology to the foreground to explore the cultural connections between the body, identity and the natural environment and to realise the potential of sacredness to other streams of

geography such as Māori geography, environmental planning, social geography and post colonial geography. I believe that what I offer here is only one example of the myriad of opportunities to research the sacred.

The purpose of this chapter, then, is to recap some of the main points of this thesis. I draw out some important and interesting points from the various chapters while making reference to how they contribute to understanding the research objectives. My research objectives were to examine critically the socio-cultural consequences of disrupted wāhi tapu and to understand the meaning attributed to wāhi tapu at Matata and the influence of certain events such as the 2005 flood. I then wanted to examine the relationship between power, sacred sites and the body. In order to meet these objectives, I needed to create a research framework that would allow the opportunity to gather information from local Māori residents at Matata as this would form my main knowledge pool.

In chapter one I introduce Matata and make reference to the fact that it is a highly important area within Māoridom as a converging point of numerous iwi as well as being the location of the Battle of Kaokaoroa, an event I point out as being central to the debate over the unearthing of bones. In chapter two I then take the opportunity to explore some of the main premises of cultural geography and how my research fits within it given that this research is concerned with unpacking dominant western approaches to the notion of sacredness and its effect on local Māori. I review some of the existing literature on sacredness generally and then within geography. I note that up until recently geographers have been slow to focus on sacredness in any great detail, which is unusual given that contemporary social and cultural geography has become preoccupied with the body and the embodied experience in various contexts yet have left out the sacredness of the body and bones from a Māori perspective (August 2004).



Since this thesis is concerned with bones, it ultimately also concerns death. It seems appropriate then to analyse the role of emotions in social situations and for these reasons I am guided by the sub-discipline of emotional geography. Throughout this thesis I take seriously the emotional toll and sense of distress the unearthing of bones are having on local Māori through the contributions of my research participants. I too, share some personal experiences of researching a topic that is very important to me and the subsequent effects it has had on me as a researcher. Central to the overall framework of this research was the inclusion of a detailed journey into traditional tikanga surrounding knowledge gathering, tapu, and the human body and highlighting the importance of the intimate relationship between people and the land. I included this information in chapter two so that it could act as a foundation in which to apply my empirical research findings.

Chapter three outlines my methodological framework. I was guided by the work of Māori academics and took considerable time creating a framework that was consistent with doing kaupapa Māori research. This involves the establishment of a research whānau which was suggested to me by a research participant and is also advocated by Māori academics like Linda Tuhiwai-Smith (1999) and Russell Bishop (1996). This enabled me to work closely with kaumatua, residents and participants to ensure that I was approaching the topic in a culturally appropriate manner. This chapter charts the way I went about contacting participants, collecting information, dealing with difficult ethical questions such as tape recording and using secondary data. In this chapter I also dedicate some time to reflecting on my positionality within my research and my effect of being linked to Matata through my whakapapa as well as the effect the participants had on me as a researcher.

Chapter four was an opportunity for me to apply some of my main research findings in an effort to meet my first research objective which was to gain an understanding about Māori meanings given to wāhi tapu at Matata and to investigate the influence of certain events such as the 2005 flood. However,

the remaining two research objectives are closely linked and cannot be easily separated from one another. I use the concept of scale to help reveal the effect of sacredness not just to individual Māori residents but also as a collective Māori identity within Matata. Using scale is a popular technique among geographers as it helps to conceptualise the effect of certain social, cultural or political issues such as gender, race, sexuality etc over a wider societal scale. In this way, it allows geographers to observe and critically investigate dominant discourses and the effect of power relations within multi-cultural, multi religious societies. Using scale enabled me to then explore these issues from a national perspective and examine the role of legislation such as the Resource Management Act.

I first examined the 'sacred body'. To understand the sacredness afforded to the human body from a Māori perspective involves first acknowledging the importance of tapu. This initial section set the stage for me to then apply some of my empirical research. I wanted to draw attention to just how long bones had been unearthed or (re) discovered in and around Matata to give some indication as to why local Māori are becoming increasingly frustrated that areas where they know contain bones are being disturbed. As a result of information gained from participants and past newspaper articles I identify three event that have all worked to compound the bones debate, the Rangitaiki Drainage Scheme, the subdivisions of an ancient battle ground known as Kaokaoroa and the 2005 flood.

Talking in great length with the research participants about these three events exposes some themes. The first major theme was that local iwi and hapu already knew of the location of bones around Matata since they were their own ancestral bones. However despite fervent insistence, they felt largely ignored. I discuss how the privileging of western knowledges are tightly bound by the influence of binary thinking and how this is an example of how ideas, perspectives and worldviews associated with spirituality or

alternative forms of knowledges are demoted as being 'unreliable' or 'unsubstantiated'.

I then widen the scale in chapter five to consider institutional responses to sacred spaces of Matata. The clashing of worldviews between western and indigenous cultures is not a new idea and has been an on-going topic of interest for archaeologists. The 2005 flood has compounded the bones debate even further. In this section I apply Sibley's (1995) idea of 'liminal spaces' to help work through how natural disasters can confuse the boundaries between public and private boundaries. I take this assertion a step further by suggesting that this concept can also be applied to examine the way sacred boundaries can also become blurred in out of the ordinary circumstances (like natural disasters) and can affect the way people understand or react to these spaces in terms of practicing appropriate tikanga.

I draw upon the works of contemporary archaeologists and note the transition from traditional methods of research which heavily relied on Eurocentric understanding of researching other cultures and more contemporary methods. A common trend advocated by scholars in this field is the move towards 'decolonising archaeology'. For example Sonya Atalay (2006) joins these discussions by suggesting that archaeologists should focus on centring indigenous concepts and ways of understanding the world. This involves 'de-centering' research methods and perspectives informed by western systems of thought (12). In a sense, I too have worked to 'decentre' western ideas of bones throughout this thesis by bringing to attention Māori perspectives on the unearthing of koiwi and the cultural systems that inform these worldviews. In this way, we can learn more about the types of concerns felt by local iwi regarding their cultural sites and spaces. It is easy to gloss over the situation at Matata and to attribute the disagreement between the council, homeowners and local iwi to a clashing of perspectives and different agendas but left as simply an observation does not offer any new or alternative ways of

understanding the landscape at Matata or provide opportunities to improve the current situation.

In this sub section I review some legislation that related to wāhi tapu. New Zealand is often applauded for its incorporation of cultural issues and the Treaty of Waitangi into current environmental legislation such as the Resource Management Act. It is commonly presented as a 'benchmark' for other countries and referred to in international publications. While the current system is encouraging, I argue that much of the potential of the Resource Management Act is hindered not only by the incorporation of confusing and somewhat vague wording but also by the assumption that regional boundaries can be segregated into easily identifiable and manageable entities. My research finding indicates that in some cases, this is a difficult task. I maintain that while consultation between authorities and iwi over wāhi tapu may escalate to heated discussions, this exchanging of dialogue is still important if change or compromise is to occur. However, I insist that it has to be done within a forum where alternative perspectives are welcomed and acknowledged, where questions are asked and open discussion from all parties involved are actively encouraged.

The final section of chapter five draws attention to the importance of silences. In chapter three, I introduced the notion of silences from a methodological point of view. Now I consider silences within the context of institutional settings. Western culture has become preoccupied with mapping and locating the world, this concern has seeped into legislative policies and is evident with boundaries, measuring and quantifying the physical land into entities. However, what this system does not allow for is the purposeful silences practised by Māori as a means of a protection mechanism for their sites of cultural significance. I suggest that while close guarding of certain information about sacred sites can be an (c)overt example of resisting hegemonic powers, it can also have a disempowering effect in that local authorities still retain the power to the final decision making. Once again this is an example

of the paradoxical space (Rose 1993) or position of Māori communities within Aotearoa. This is a particularly complicated matter, one that should be approached in a way that considers the practices of tikanga Maori and acknowledges that while there may be different cultural views on the discovery, handling and future of unearthed bones, learning more about the worldviews and opinions that inform these perspectives is valuable and worthwhile in order to make progressive steps in improving the relationships between and within multicultural societies.

### **Future research**

This research has focused on Māori, their feelings, identities, sacredness and the environment. The scope of this enquiry could be extended to include the wider community, more specifically the views and opinions of the homeowners of the Kaokaoroa subdivision. Many of them have had their house destroyed or severely damaged and including these emotional experiences would be valuable. This angle could also expose the dynamics of community relations between community members who may share different opinion and perspectives in relation to the discovery of human bones.

The notion of bones 'out of place' can be alarming for anybody as it suddenly reminds us of the certainty of death and the thought of finding bones in *your house* can be particularly distressing. This is a line of enquiry that I would like to continue further, that is, to talk to the homeowners ( in particular the homeowners of the Kaokaoroa subdivision) since they are an integral part of the wider political situation at Matata in regards to waahi tapu.

While I touched on the concept of Sibley's (1995) 'spaces of ambiguity', I believe that there is potential to apply this idea further. Talking to residents who were directly affected by the flood would reveal some interesting material about how people defend 'their' boundary when 'Others' proclaim spiritual or cultural attachment which they do not relate to. I think that this could expose some interesting findings relating to the perceived idea that these (pakeha)

homeowners share no sympathy with local iwi. It could disrupt the binary of Māori and pakeha worldviews even further by demonstrating that not all pakeha hold 'anti-spiritual' views just the same way that all Māori (at Matata and around the country) do not necessarily share equal affiliation to the land and the environment. This could contribute to existing work by geographers on 'hybridity'. There are many possible avenues that could be approached from a number of different geographical theories which I believe is testament to the importance of taking notions of sacredness seriously in academic scholarship.

## Glossary of Māori words

Aotearoa	New Zealand
Hapu	Pregnant, sub-tribe
Iwi	Tribe
Karakia	Prayer
Kaupapa Māori	Māori ideology
Kaumatua	Elder
Koiwi	Bones
Korero	Speak, narrative
Kupu Māori	Māori word
Mahi	Work, labour
Mahinga Kai	Garden, cultivation
Mauri	Life principle, special character
Mana	Integrity, Prestige
Mautauranga Māori	Māori Knowledge
Nga Maihi	Hapu of Ngati Awa
Pakeha	Non-Māori, European
Papatūānuku	Earth mother
Ranginui	Sky father
Rohe	Boundary, margin, territory
Tangata whenua	Indigenous people of the land
Tangihanga	Mourning, funeral
Tapu	Sacred, forbidden, confidential

Te Ao	The world
Te Awa o te Atua	River of the Gods
Te Kore	The nothingness
Te reo	Language
Tikanga	Meaning, custom
Tikanga Māori	Māori custom
Tohunga	Expert, specialist, priest
Tipuna	ancestor
Urupā	Burial ground, cemetery
Wāhi tapu	Sacred, restricted ground,
Whakapoukorero	Sacred Mountain of Matata
Whakawhanuangatanga	Kinship, links, facilitating a more open relationship than researcher and researched, network of interactive inks
Whānau	Extended family, give birth
Whenua	Land, country, placenta



## **Appendix one**

### **Introductory Letter**

#### **Sacredness of discovery: The significance of the discovery of ancestral bones within the Matata rohe**

I am a graduate student at Te Whare Wananga o Waikato. I am currently working on my thesis which explores the cross- cultural difference between Māori custom of death and the sacredness of the human body and non Māori attitudes the discovery of human bones. This research topic arose out the continual unearthing of ancestral bones as a result of the Matata flood in 2005.

In order to gain insight into this issue I would like to talk to you because I believe your opinions and perspectives would be of particular value to this research. I invite you to participate in an individual interview. The interview will be a relaxed korero between you and me at a time and place that suits you.

I have attached a copy of the consent form and intended interview schedule.

The central points of enquiry that I would like to discuss are:

- the current state of Matata in terms of waahi tapu: Kaokaoroa and te Awa o te Atua
- activity up the valley of Whakapaukorere
- the difference between Māori and non- Māori views concerning death and the sacredness of the human body
- Te Haerenga wairua atu o te tinana (the spiritual journey of the body)

If you have any queries, comments or concerns about this research please feel free to contact either my research supervisor Dr Lynda Johnston or myself at stage of the research.

Contact details: Keri Brown      (07) 859 3496, (07) 3124346, (027) 323 0167  
Email: kamb1@waikato.ac.nz

Lynda Johnston (07) 838 4466 Ext. 8795, (027) 322 5415  
Email: lyndaj@waikato.ac.nz

## **Appendix two**

### **Consent Form Information Sheet**

Thank you for considering this research. If you decide to participate, I will protect your identity by using a pseudonym throughout the course of the research. I will enforce to the best of my ability that all discussions held within the interview or focus group should remain private and confidential and should not be shared with anyone outside of that situation. After the interview I would like to show you a copy of my draft report before I continue to ensure that I have captured your opinions correctly. I acknowledge the highly culturally sensitive content of this research and you have the right to withdraw from the research up until one month after the interview. You can also withdraw comments up until one month after the interview as well. You have the right to request certain sections to be left from print and you can also decline from answering any questions if you choose.

The interview will take approximately an hour and the focus group will run for approximately an hour. The interviews will be held at a date, time and venue that is arranged around your personal schedule and the focus groups will be arranged at a time and location suitable for all Participants

All information will remain secure at all times. Data contained on computer databases will be accessible by password only. I will be the only person handling the collected data, it will remain strictly confidential and it will be properly destroyed afterwards.

This research is for the requirements of my Masters thesis. As part of University guidelines, three copies must be produced. Two hard copies (one for the university thesis collection and the other for the Geography department) and one online accessible copy. For you to participate in this project it is important that you agree and sign the consent form below.

## Appendix three

### Research consent form

**Description of project:** this research aims to explore the cross- cultural difference between Māori custom of death and the sacredness of the human body and non Māori attitudes the discovery of human bones. This research topic arose out the continual unearthing of ancestral bones as a result of the Matata flood in 2005.

I (your name) \_\_\_\_\_ **agree to participate** in this research project which is being carried out by Keri Brown and supervised by Dr Lynda Johnston, Department of Geography , Tourism and Environmental Planning, Te Whare Wananga o Waikato. Ph. 07 859 3496, 07 3124346, 027 323 1067 email: kamb1@waikato.ac.nz

#### I understand that:

- a) all the data collected will remain secure under lock or on a computer database accessible by password only

Interviews: My identity will remain confidential and anonymous, unless I state otherwise.

Focus groups: information shared within the group should remain confidential  
to protect peoples anonymity

- b) I have the right to withdraw form the research or withdraw certain sections of the interview any time up to one month after the interview. I can request that parts of my interview left from print
- c) I do / do not consent to the interviews being tape recorded
- e) Information will be used as requirements for a Masters thesis which included two hard copies and one online copy for the University. This research may also be used for presentations within the University. Individuals will not be identified by name in any publications or reports.

#### I would like to take part in the interview:

\_\_\_\_\_ (to be signed and dated by you)

\_\_\_\_\_ (to be signed and dated by  
Keri Brown)

This research has been approved by the Faculty of Arts and Social Sciences Ethics  
Committee

## **Appendix four**

### **Interview Schedule**

The interviews will be semi-structured, like an informal korero. Below are a list of topics I would like to discuss but this is flexible and I encourage you to add any additional issues if you wish.

#### **Current State of Kaokaoroa and Te Awa o te atua:**

1. Looking back at the transition from the flood through to today, what are your thoughts on the current state of waahi tapu at Matata? In particular te Kaokaoroa and te Awa o te Atua?

#### **Activity at Whakapaukoreroa**

1. The council has decided to create a debris dam which has lead to a lot of human traffic up the valley, how do you respond to this in terms of the sacredness of this area to Maori?
2. The Beacon published an article about Auckland university students using certain areas of Matata for an archaeological dig? What were your reactions to this dig?
3. What was the general response from residents of Matata?
4. What are your opinions about the way the media has reported on these discoveries?

#### **Difference between Maori and Pakeha views concerning death**

1. How has differences in approach to death affected local Māori at Matata?

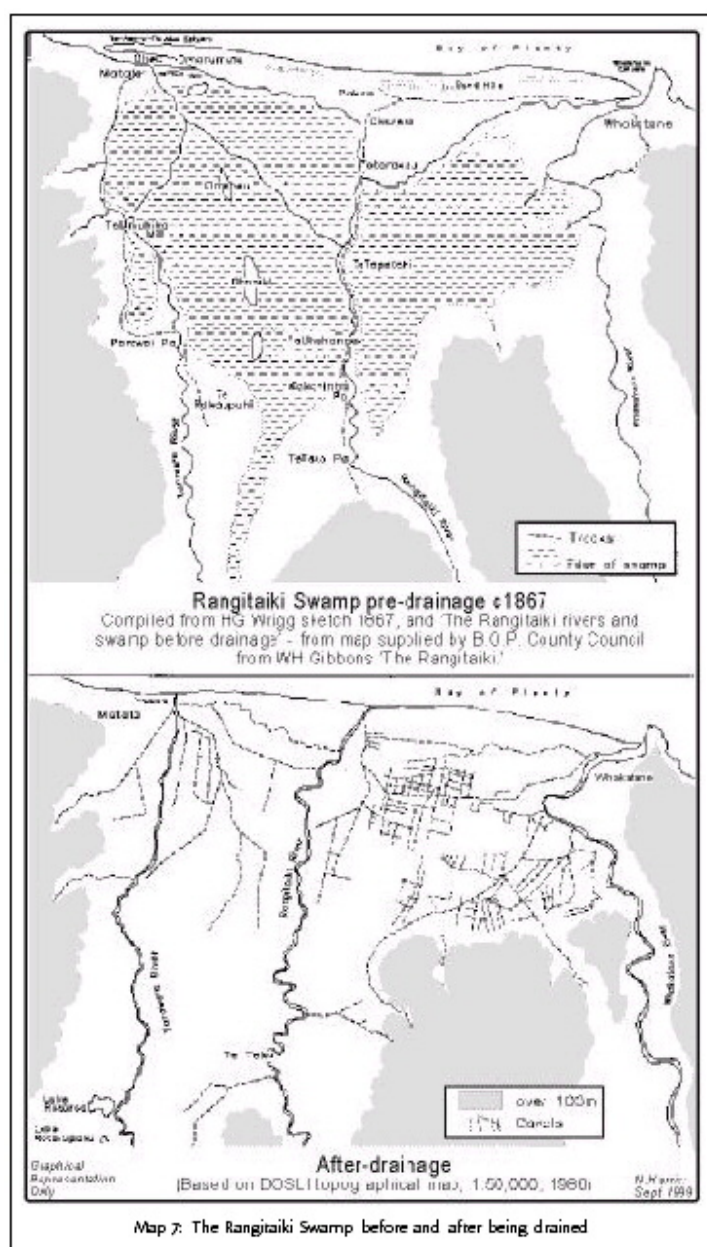
#### **The spiritual journey of the body**

1. What rituals/procedure occurs to bones that are discovered in peoples private sections?
2. Ngati Awa established a 'neutral burial ground' for bones unearthed during early sub division of Kaokaoroa, what are your thought on this?
3. In your opinion, how does the discovery of ancestral bones affect the sense of Maori identity?
4. How are these discoveries linked with Maori attachment to land?
5. How should the discovery of bones be dealt with?
6. What are your opinions about the councils role concerning the discovery on human bones?

## Appendix five

## The Drainage of the Rangitaiki swamp

Diagram showing the area of the Rangitaiki Swamp before and after drainage.



Source: Waitangi Tribunal 2007

## Appendix six

### Newspaper article from the *Whakatane Beacon* "When nature roars we must now listen" 27 May, 2005

# When nature roars we must now listen

IN response to the flooding at Matata, I have seen expressed in newspapers the idea that the localised flooding and damage to homes has resulted from the anger of Maori tipuna regarding the removal of bones from the Matata battlefield site known as Te Kaokaoroa.

Several hundred Ngati Awa and allied forces died at Te Kaokaoroa in 1864 at the hands of the colonial army and its Maori allies such as those from Te Arawa. Incidentally, after the conflict the colonial government took Matata away from Ngati Awa and gave the town to Te Arawa as a reward.

I would like to support the idea of divine intervention but from a Ngati Awa perspective.

On April 23, 2005, at the Matata site known as Te Kaokaoroa, several large boulders were dedicated to the memory of those that fell in the battle of 1864. The stones used in the dedication were moved there by human hand.

Now consider what has transpired. One month after the dedication, the deluge of Matata resulted in the movement of huge boulders on to the Te Kaokaoroa site. Those boulders came from



**DEVASTATION: Boulders, logs and debris have devastated the coastal town of Matata.**

B1180-041

Whakapaukorero, the mountain behind Matata township.

Some of these boulders are many times larger than the ones used a month ago for the dedication and, in order for those boulders to be placed, homes owned by pakeha and Te Arawa descendants were moved aside by the floodwaters.

Surely, this divine re-enactment mirrors the human act of a month before and therefore could be considered divine confirmation and stamp of approval for what was done.

If divine intervention is considered a possible explanation of the

events as evidenced by newspaper articles, then this alternative possibility is just as relevant.

While I am sympathetic to the plight of those disadvantaged by the flooding, I must point out that no human lives were lost in the process – in itself, a miracle.

It seems to me that there is indeed a message for us in what has happened and that when nature roars we must listen very carefully to the message because it might be trying to tell us something.

Te Hauoterangi Tutua  
Kaumatua  
Ngati Awa

Source: *Whakatane Beacon* 2005



## Appendix seven

### Newspaper article in the Whakatane Beacon University's secret dig angers Maori

Friday, February 9, 2007

www.whakatanebeacon.co.nz

■ Archaeologists engage in 'rogue' mission

# University's secret dig angers Maori

WHARE AKUHATA

NGATI Tuwharetoa ki Kāwharau leaders are angry that Auckland University academics have conducted an archaeological dig near Matata without telling them.

Archaeologist Geoff Irwin and more than 20 associates are conducting the dig at Kohika, between the northern end of Sutherland Road and the Tarawera River. They started work on Wednesday last week.

Yesterday morning tribal representatives Tomai Fox, John Peri and Anthony Olsen gathered at the farm entrance to Kohika to confront the archaeologists.

Mr Olsen said they had been unaware a dig was happening and were angry and disappointed at not being consulted or allowed to monitor it. The site was a significant wahi tapu for his tribe.

The group intended to stop the archaeologists and to find out what was to be taken away and what was to be returned. While they waited, two cars approached but they turned around when occupants saw the three men and drove away.

"We want assurances and it is important to know why they didn't come to talk to us," Mr Peri said.

Mr Olsen said Professor Irwin, head of the university's anthropology department, was using an authority to carry out the dig that was originally given by kaitiaki in 1972, when the site was first discovered.

Mr Olsen said the dig was an "arrogant" gesture. He said Professor Irwin had given different justifications for it, including that the site was drying out. He said his inquiries with Environment Bay of Plenty showed this was incorrect. Mr Olsen said Professor Irwin also claimed cows were damaging the site, but talks with farmers discounted this.

On Wednesday, Professor Irwin said the archaeologists were at Kohika as part of a joint programme with Ngati Awa. The dig was funded by a 2005 Marsden Grant administered by the Royal Society of New Zealand for a three-year project that commenced in 2005. He said the excavation was supported by both Ngati Awa and the Whakatane and District Historical Society. He said Pouoro Ngārope, a Ngati Awa kaitiaki and chairman of the Kohika Trust, was a research associate.

Mr Olsen said he was concerned



**HOT WORK:** Workers, mostly graduate students, excavate a building site, which they assume is where ritual activities were carried out because it contains no household artefacts.  
Photo Troy Baker B5294-35

the issue would affect the relationship between Ngati Awa and Ngati Tuwharetoa ki Kāwharau, which both parties had worked hard to improve.

Mr Olsen described Professor Irwin's work as that of a "rogue individual".

He said after the 2005 dig Ngati Tuwharetoa ki Kāwharau was assured it would be consulted prior to subsequent excavations.

Mr Olsen said runanga chief executive Jeremy Gardiner was unaware of the dig when he approached him about it. Environment Ngati Awa manager Beverley Hughes was unaware of the dig when contacted by the *Beacon* on Tuesday.

Yesterday, Mr Gardiner said the runanga had a longstanding relationship with Auckland University. Consent had been granted for three digs to be carried out and this was the last of them.

Mr Peri said the dig left him heartbroken. "I wept for our tipuna who have been interfered with and I'm upset with Pouoro and his actions."

Mr Fox said the group was concerned that if the dig was allowed to happen other wahi tapu might be at risk.

A collection of Kohika artefacts is held in the Whakatane District Museum and is unique in New Zealand for providing archaeologists and anthropologists with insight into how pre-European Maori lived. Much of the Kohika swamp peat is preserved in peat. Artefacts collected from Kohika in the original excavation were taken to Auckland University for study and preservation and were returned to Ngati Awa in the 1990s.

Professor Irwin said his latest excavation had revealed many more artefacts and information about the site.



**STOPWORK TRIO:** Ngati Tuwharetoa ki Kāwharau representatives Tomai Fox, John Peri and Anthony Olsen.  
B5303-03

Source: Akuhata 2007

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